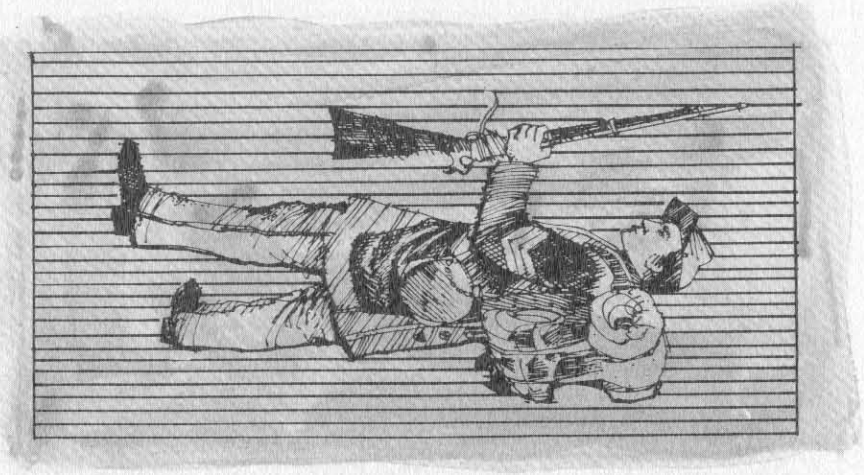

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PLAN

This document was prepared to replace the 1968 Master Plan for Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park. That plan has become obsolete and no longer reflects existing conditions at the park.

The General Management Plan will direct management, use, and development of the park for the next 10 to 15 years. A complete list of the park's management objectives, as documented in the 1984 "Statement for Management," is included in appendix B. In summary, they are to commemorate the four Civil War battles that took place here; to mark and preserve the breastworks, earthworks, gun emplacements, walls, and other defenses or shelters used by the armies in these battles; to make the historical points accessible to the public and to students of the battles; to facilitate public enjoyment and understanding by preserving the scenes of battles; to encourage compatible use and development of adjacent lands, which form the setting of the preserved historic features, in ways and at a scale that does not intrude on the visitor's mood; and to minimize the impact of intrusive development.

The issues facing the park today that relate to the park's management objectives involve both the preservation of historic resources and settings and the provision of services and facilities for visitor use. Two other plans have been prepared that contain strategies to implement the planning decisions in this General Management Plan. The Resources Management Plan, which is updated annually, deals with cultural and natural resource management concerns in more detail than this document. The Land Protection Plan, which was prepared in conjunction with this General Management Plan, addresses the required addition, retention, or deletion of park lands and the recommended protection measures within and adjacent to the boundaries to meet park purposes and perpetuate park values. Both of these plans include detailed proposals to improve management and ensure resource preservation. The major issues they address are listed below, and the recommended actions are described in this document, along with the proposals for visitor use and park administration.

The park's 38 miles of earthworks have received very little maintenance in the past, and measures need to be taken to reduce deterioration. Recent studies have shown that earthworks can best be preserved if brush and trees are removed from them.

Many areas that were open fields at the time of the battles, and played key roles in those battles, are now forested. Similarly, some areas that were heavily forested during the battle action are now open fields. Both of these factors make interpretation and understanding of the battle strategies difficult.

Some nonhistoric buildings continue to intrude on the historic scene, diminishing the visitor experience. As such structures are acquired by the Park Service, decisions need to be made on how to dispose of them.

Adjacent urban development and commuter traffic are encroaching on the historic scene, and the potential for new access development exists. Land protection measures need to be implemented to minimize the effects of incompatible or intrusive land uses.

The main park visitor center, built on the Fredericksburg battlefield in 1935, has an optimum capacity of 400 people per day. It currently receives more than 80,000 people per year, and sometimes more than 1,000 per day. In addition to its limited capacity, the center lacks adequate parking and handicap access, and it would be very difficult to modify. The Chancellorsville visitor center operates efficiently and could handle expanded use, but additional restroom facilities would be required. There are no regularly staffed visitor contact facilities at Wilderness and Spotsylvania battlefields.

Sunken Road was the scene of the heaviest fighting during the Battle of Fredericksburg and is the most important landmark on the battlefield. Confederates packed into Sunken Road in December 1862 and killed or wounded about 8,000 Northern troops in the open area just below them. A small strip of park land at the foot of Marye's Heights is all that is available to convey the story of the bitter fighting at this point. Although Sunken Road is owned almost in its entirety by the National Park Service, Fredericksburg residents for years have been using the one-way route as a shortcut between the two major east-west arteries through the city. Conflicts between traffic and visitor use need to be eliminated.

The relationship of the four battlefields to one another is often confusing to visitors, as are directional signs to and within them. Circulation within the battlefields is sometimes slow and circuitous because original roads were built to follow trench lines (earthworks) rather than connect significant features. First-time visitors are often unsure of what there is to see and do within the park.

The existing maintenance area, which has never had a comprehensive plan, is crowded and inefficiently laid out. At least double the available covered storage space is needed to keep expensive equipment and vehicles out of the weather. The site is also on historic ground near the earthworks along Lee Drive in the Fredericksburg battlefield.

The public involvement portion of this planning process began in May 1983 with the distribution of the "Preplanning Newsletter and Public Response Form" to individuals and groups on the park's mailing list. Eleven public and agency "scoping" meetings were held in the Fredericksburg and Richmond areas during the week of May 16, 1983. The public meetings were held in Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania Court House. Meetings were held with officials of Spotsylvania, Stafford, Orange, and Caroline counties, the city of Fredericksburg, the Virginia Department of Highways and Transportation, and the state historic preservation officer. Approximately 100 people attended the 11 meetings, and 12 response forms with management suggestions were returned.

As part of the planning effort, three alternatives were developed to solve problems and meet management objectives--alternative A, continue present management (no action); alternative B, enhance historic setting and expand interpretive services (the National Park Service's proposed course of action); and alternative C, expand opportunities for nonhistorical programs and activities.

The three alternatives along with their potential impacts were presented in a Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Assessment, which was circulated to the appropriate agencies, organizations, and the public for review during May-June 1986. Comments were received and considered in the development of this final General Management Plan. The regional director, Mid-Atlantic Region, approved the proposal as the final plan. Based on the review, it was determined that the proposed action was neither controversial nor constituted a major federal action. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. A finding of no significant impact (FONSI) has been approved and is included as appendix E.