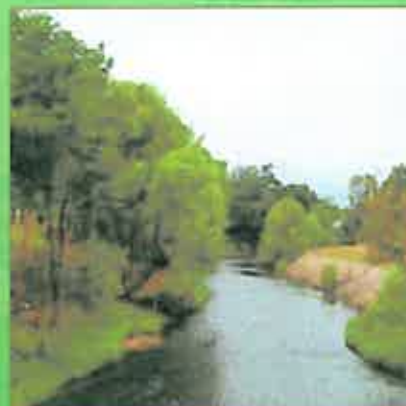


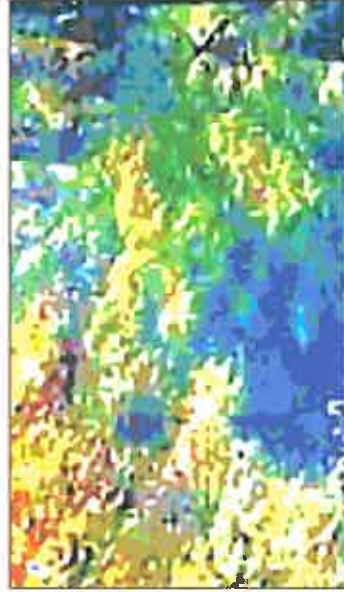


A Park System for the Nation's Capital

Ideas to Achieve the Full Potential of Washington's Parks and Open Space



Ideas to Achieve the Full Potential of Washington's Parks and Open Space



The CapitalSpace initiative is a partnership effort among the National Capital Planning Commission, the National Park Service, and several District of Columbia agencies. The initiative was jointly funded by NCPC and the government of the District of Columbia. NCPC had primary responsibility for oversight of the initiative with its principal consultant, AECOM.

Visit www.capitalspace.gov to view this plan electronically and review model projects and extensive background information.

Adopted by the National Capital Planning Commission, April 1, 2010

L. Preston Bryant, Jr., Chairman, Presidential Appointee

Herbert F. Ames, Presidential Appointee

John M. Hart, Presidential Appointee

Arrington Dixon, Mayoral Appointee



Fort Reno

Through the many community parks spread across the city, the extensive stream valley corridors, forest preserves, the sweep of the Fort Circle Parks, the formal downtown parks, and the National Mall, parks and open spaces have defined and set apart Washington from other American cities. To their users, however, Washington's parks and open spaces are often fragmented, not clearly discernable, and are not meeting their full potential as the treasured places they can be. For example, many triangle parks along L'Enfant's grand avenues have lost much of their greenery, ecological corridors have become reduced in size, and trail systems have significant gaps that limit their use. Throughout the city, parks suffer from both under- and over-use.

CapitalSpace examined federal and District parks and open space comprehensively and found that within Washington's park system, the wide variety of park types, sizes, and traits, coupled with shared jurisdiction between local and federal authorities, presents challenges in meeting both local and national needs and difficulties in park planning, enhancement, and maintenance.

CapitalSpace also found that there are tremendous opportunities with Washington's park system as a whole to ensure that parks are accessible to everyone who lives in, works in, or visits the city; that they help connect various communities; that they provide a diversity of passive and active recreation; that they offer myriad natural, cultural, commemorative, and historic spaces; and that they contribute to a healthy, sustainable and livable city.

The Six Big Ideas identify recommendations that can best be accomplished by the CapitalSpace partner agencies working together and are intended to maximize existing assets, address current and future needs, and seize upon existing opportunities. They include ideas for new planning and development policies, additional physical improvements and alternative uses, and approaches to operation and maintenance.

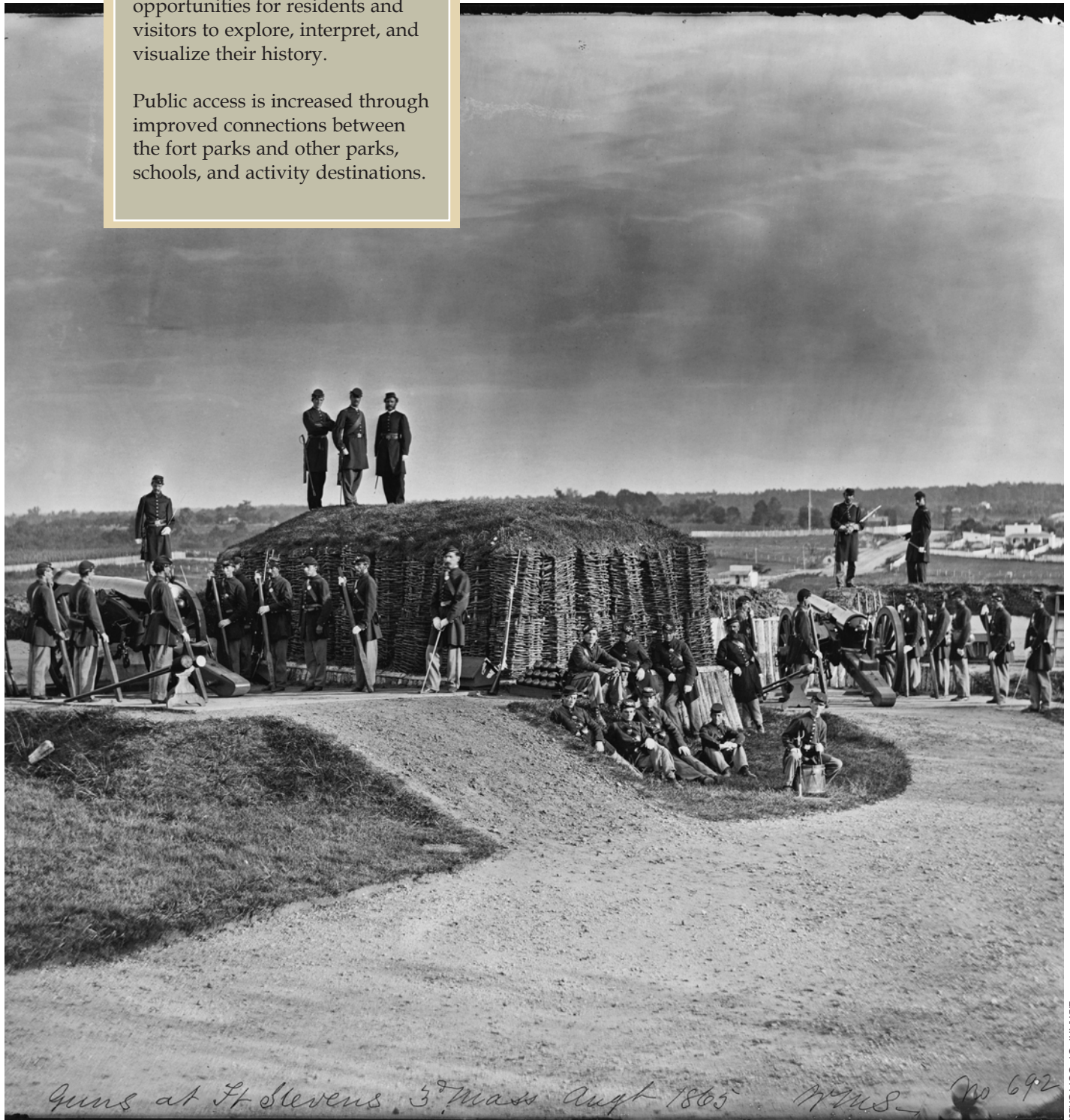


Schoolyards are maintained and improved to provide diverse opportunities for learning, healthy living, and recreation, and are recognized as a vital part of Washington's parks and open-space system.

OBJECTIVES

The Fort Circle Parks are appreciated as local and national historic, cultural, natural, and recreational treasures, providing opportunities for residents and visitors to explore, interpret, and visualize their history.

Public access is increased through improved connections between the fort parks and other parks, schools, and activity destinations.



Fort Stevens, 1865

Linking the Fort Circle Parks

1



Fort Stevens

Big Idea in Action

A ring of forts was erected around Washington during the Civil War to protect the nation's capital from the Confederate Army. Years later, the McMillan Park Commission proposed that the Civil War forts be memorialized in a unified system connected by a scenic, uninterrupted parkway. Ultimately, the forts and adjacent connecting parcels were acquired and the sites were placed in the National Register of Historic Places and became part of the National Park System.

Envisioning the future, the Fort Circle Parks will be connected in a picturesque, lush greenway that links Washington's neighborhoods with adjacent communities, the Anacostia riverfront, and diverse recreational opportunities, including the extensive regional trail system.

Residents and visitors will find within the Fort Circle Parks a myriad of opportunities for recreation, leisure, enjoyment of natural resources and wildlife, historical interpretation, and cultural education. Individual fort parks will have features that attract the interests of tourists, local historians, and civil war enthusiasts, while providing much needed green space, activities, and areas for active and passive recreation for local residents, workers, and visitors.

In 1937, the Civilian Conservation Corps reconstructed Fort Stevens partially. The fort is the only battleground in which a U.S. President, Abraham Lincoln, has come under enemy fire in war while in office. It is also the only restored fortification in Washington and offers a unique opportunity to begin interpretation of the history of the Fort Circle Parks.



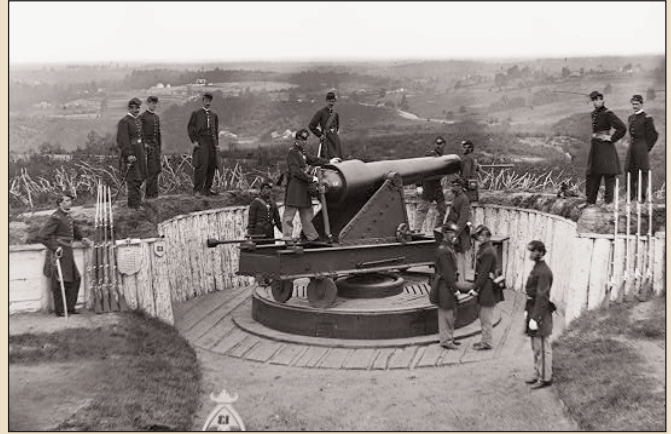
Selected History of the Fort Circle Parks

One of the legacies of the Civil War in the Washington region is a system of forts and defensive earthworks. Stretching over 37 miles, with 68 enclosed forts and batteries, 93 unarmed batteries, three blockhouses, and 20 miles of trenches, the original system of fortification extended into Virginia and protected the capital from Confederate attacks. When the Civil War ended, the forts were abandoned and the original landowners reclaimed much of the fort property. By the 1890's, organizations and neighborhoods began to advocate for the preservation of these war defenses. The War Department kept eleven forts ultimately, and one battery for historical interest.

In 1902, the McMillan Plan proposed a regional park system that included a parkway. The "Fort Drive" was to memorialize the remaining forts, maintaining them as parkland and linking them with a scenic ring road. In accordance with this proposal, two significant federal initiatives created what is now known as the Fort Circle Parks—the Capper-Cramton Act and the New Deal. Congress approved funding for the system through the 1930 Capper-Cramton Act. The legislation included a specific requirement that the forts should be recommissioned as parks if they were no longer needed for military purposes.

The Civil War Defenses of Washington

In 2004, NPS released a Historic Resource Study of the Civil War Defenses of Washington. The narrative history and accompanying historical analysis provides a comprehensive study of the Fort Circle Parks and includes detailed research on subjects such as non-federal owned sites related to Battle of Fort Stevens, logistics, roads, day to day activities within the forts, relationship of minorities, pre-Civil War background, the Fort Drive, and the post-Civil War history of the fortifications.



Fort Totten, ca. 1865

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the Capper-Cramton Act provided the National Capital Park and Planning Commission, (predecessor of NCPC), with the authority and funds to acquire many of the Civil War forts and adjacent land parcels for the parkway. By 1937, the Commission had acquired all but one of the 23 ½ miles planned for the parkway. Under the New Deal, the Civilian Conservation Corps completed a section of Fort Drive at Fort Dupont, south toward Good Hope Road. The Works Progress Administration completed a section of Fort Drive in the Fort Reno area. Other segments, such as Military Road through Rock Creek Park, were also completed in the 1950's, but there was no further progress on Fort Drive following construction of these segments.

After World War II, support for the Fort Drive shifted from developing it as a pleasure drive to a limited access highway. Critics claimed it was too expensive and impractical, and by the early 1960s, the idea of connecting the Fort Circle Parks with a continuous roadway was abandoned. Citizens and planners alike were concerned with neighborhood and traffic impacts. As a result, in 1965, NCPC issued a report called *Fort Park System: A Re-evaluation Study of Fort Drive, Washington DC* that proposed that the Fort Drive be renamed the Fort Park System and the scenic drive concept be abandoned in favor of a greenway trail connecting the forts. This plan resulted in construction of a short section of a bike and pedestrian trail for the section between forts Stanton and Mahan.

Although there was an increase of interest in the forts at the one-hundred-year anniversary of the Civil War, development threats to the parks increased, and encroachment upon the spaces for public uses other than recreation became a continuing threat. For example, Fort Reno has become over time the site for a new reservoir; a facility for the K-9 Division of the Secret Service; a Department of Public Works storage yard; and Federal Aviation Administration monitoring equipment.

Following a period of jurisdictional transfers between federal agencies, the NPS was given jurisdiction over the fort parks in 1933. In 1968, NPS released a master plan for the Fort Circle Parks. The master plan envisioned the forts as neighborhood parks offering a broad range of recreational and interpretative programs, including day and overnight camps all connected by a 23-mile bike and pedestrian trail. However, few of the recommendations and plans from the 1968 plan were ever implemented. In 2004, because of the lack of implementation of the recommendations in the earlier master plan, and because the management of these sites is divided among three separate NPS units—National Capital Parks-East, Rock Creek Park, and George Washington Memorial Parkway---the NPS completed the *General Management Plan: Fort Circle Parks* to provide a unified management concept for the significant cultural and natural resources associated with the specific NPS fort parks, now referred to by the NPS as the Fort Circle Parks.

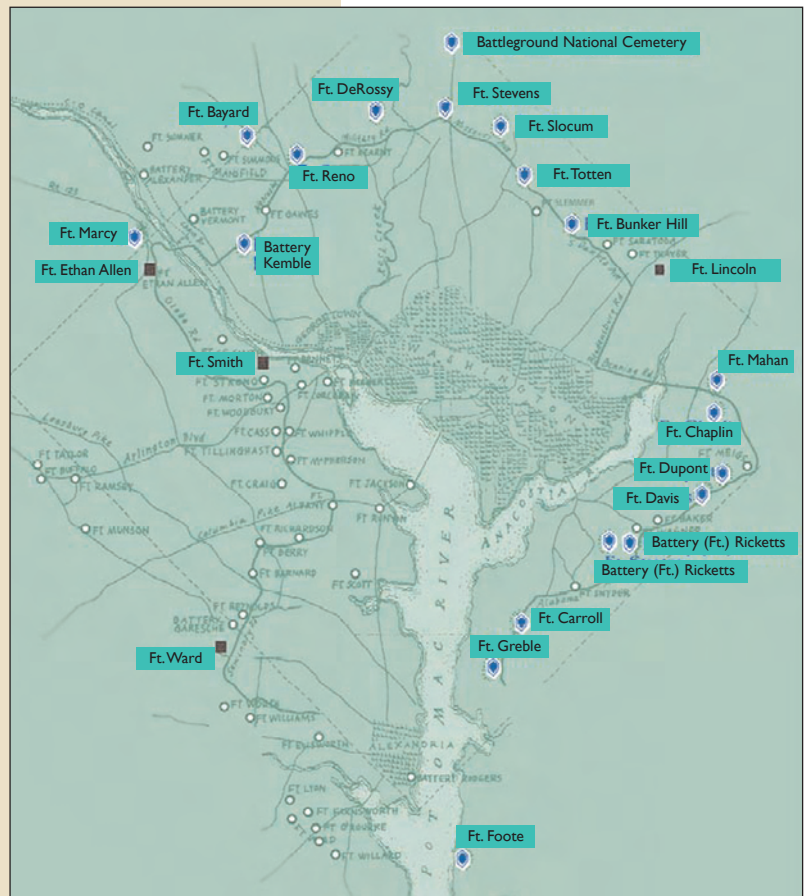
This plan will guide the management of the parks over the next 10-15 years, and sets a general vision for the management of the fort parks as a system, without setting site-specific management objectives for individual park forts.

The three stated goals are to

- 1) preserve and interpret the historical resources,
- 2) conserve the urban green space linkages, and
- 3) provide compatible recreational opportunities.

The management plan also provides a direction for visitor use of the fort parks by prescribing in detail the resource conditions and visitor experiences that should be maintained in each of the park's management, or use, zones.

Today, implementation of NPS's management plan for the Fort Circle Parks is underway. Linking the Fort Circle Parks explores opportunities for federal and District agencies and the public to not only promote the management plan's recommendations, but to build upon them through ideas for better use of the fort parks as community assets, and link them with surrounding communities, waterfronts, and local and regional trail systems.





The entrance to Fort Mahan (top and right) and the existing stream corridor in Fort Stanton.



Challenges

After the Civil War, many of the forts were deemed surplus and the land returned to its original owners. Most forts were abandoned to the elements, as the forests and native vegetation rapidly reclaimed the land and, in many cases, obscured the earthworks completely. Now, the forts are largely forgotten, and many of the stunning views looking in toward the capital city and out from the forts have been blocked.

Few residents know about the forts, the role that they played in defending Washington from attack during the Civil War, or the unique role they played in the city's African-American history. Many freed or escaped slaves sought refuge at the forts, where they found safe haven and work. After the war, many settled in these areas establishing early African-American neighborhoods.

The residents who do advocate for the fort parks today are passionate, yet diverse in their interests and visions. Some believe that restoration and preservation of the historic elements are paramount. Other advocates believe that the fort parks should provide more active recreational opportunities, especially in the areas of the city that don't have enough active recreational facilities. Balancing the various users' interests is challenging, especially given the shortage of funding available for capital improvements and maintenance.



A trail sign at Fort Stanton helps wayfinding and informs the surrounding communities of this valuable recreation resource.

Opportunities

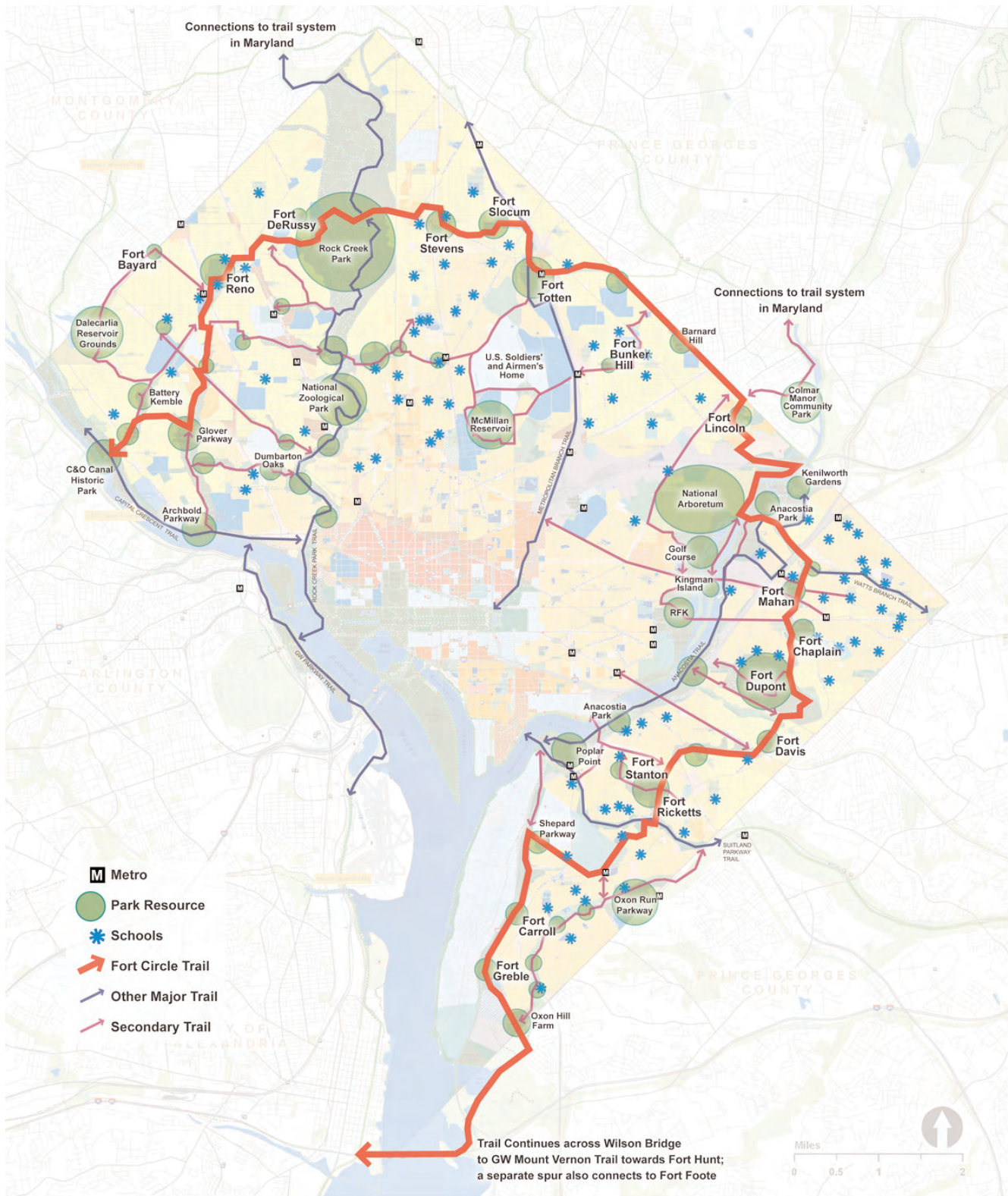
Together, the Fort Circle Parks represent a significant landscape element that played an important role in the history of the Civil War. NPS is committed to focusing on improving cultural and natural resources and recreation to create parks that tell the stories of the Civil War Defenses through interpretation, educational programs, and other experiences.

Each individual fort park has tremendous potential to provide both national and local amenities—to attract the interests of tourists, local historians, and civil war enthusiasts, and to provide much needed green space and activities for local residents and workers. Cultivating diverse and passionate users of the Forts Circle Parks will help to protect and sustain the parks and the greenway in the future.

While each fort park is unique, the strength of the entire system is the ability to link together the major fort parks, which can serve as activity hubs with their own appropriate uses, creating a verdant connected greenway around the city. The greenway could then have a series of loop segments that thread together surrounding neighborhood parks, recreational facilities, and other important cultural, historical, and community features like schools, community centers, transit, and other local and regional trail systems.

Potential Fort Circle Parks Trail Connections

This map identifies opportunities for strengthened connections between the fort parks and other parks, schools, and access points.



Recommendations

Linking the Fort Circle Parks

Battery Ricketts
information sign



Promote the Fort Circle Parks and Greenway as a National Historic, Cultural, and Recreational Treasure

Providing opportunities for residents and visitors to explore, interpret, and visualize the history of the Fort Circle Parks is needed, as remains of many of the forts are slowly vanishing.

- ◆ Install park and trail signage and interpretive stations to provide information, celebrate important vistas, and impart the park's role in the Civil War.



ANDYIR TRAIL BUDDY

Hiking at Fort Stevens

- ◆ Increase visitor resources and programming, especially near trail heads.
- ◆ Build public awareness about the Fort Circle Parks and the greenway.

Increase Public Access by Connecting the Fort Circle Parks to Other Destinations

Connecting the Fort Circle Parks to other parks, schools, neighborhoods, and other destinations increases accessibility to the numbers of activities in the parks.

- ◆ Design and build the entire greenway trail to link all of the fort parks.
- ◆ Improve existing trails, including the hiker-biker trail, with increased maintenance, signage, and interpretation.
- ◆ Strengthen connections from the greenway to transit, schools, and other parks with improved streetscape conditions, street crossings, on-road bike lanes, and signage.
- ◆ Provide low-impact trails within the fort parks to offer opportunities for discovery of views, exploration of interior woodlands, and native habitats.

Activate the Fort Circle Parks and Greenway for Residents and Visitors

The Fort Circle Parks were once community gathering places. Selective park activities can engage residents and visitors in the parks rich natural environment, and cultural history.

- ◆ Improve existing recreational facilities, with an emphasis on recreation fields.
- ◆ Enhance cultural and natural interpretive amenities provided within the parks.
- ◆ Enhance the park edges to be more welcoming to residents and visitors.

Protect and Celebrate the Diverse Natural Resources of the Fort Circle Parks

The Fort Circle parks preserve significant natural features, including mature native hardwood forests and diverse critical habitat for indigenous flora and fauna that are rarely found in an urban setting

- ◆ Restore upland and stream habitats by managing invasive species and daylighting stream channels where feasible.
- ◆ Interpret natural resources through identification of native vegetation, habitat, and species.
- ◆ Expand nature-based educational programming with schools and other organizations to educate and inform about habitats and natural systems, and build park appreciation.
- ◆ Utilize innovative techniques, such as low-impact stormwater management, to address impacts to natural resources and landscapes.



Bird Watching

Fort Circle Park Model Projects



Fort Mahan and Fort Stanton

Model approaches to applying the recommendations to link the Fort Circle Parks were studied at Fort Stanton and Fort Mahan. These fort parks were selected because they are both in communities currently underserved by neighborhood parks and are experiencing significant new development. The studies researched and analyzed challenges specific to each park, and identified opportunities based on the recommendations to link the Fort Circle Parks.

Fort Mahan—*The Gateway to Fort Circle Parks East*

Fort Mahan is an NPS park consisting of a cleared, grassy plateau with a multi-purpose recreational field that is surrounded by heavily wooded hillsides. Along the eastern edge are small, flat grassy areas. Historic fort earthworks are near the top of the eastern edge of the hillside. The park receives limited use, even though it is adjacent to a redeveloping commercial corridor and is situated between two Metro stations. Specific issues and opportunities include

- ◆ Increasing the limited interpretive and visitor resources associated with the Civil War and fort, including enhancing the incredible views to the U.S. Capitol from the park that are obscured by trees.
- ◆ Improving or installing on-site sidewalks along the perimeter and trails through the park, including improved connections to Marvin Gaye Park and Miller Park and connections to the Metro stations, bus routes, multiple schools, and Boys and Girls Club. The park has the opportunity to be a vibrant community connector rather than a barrier, as it is now.
- ◆ Capitalizing on nearby residential development and the redeveloping commercial corridor by positioning the park as a true community asset and east side gateway to the Fort Circle Parks.
- ◆ Improving and connecting the active recreational facilities at the park to the adjacent DPR/DCPS property to better serve neighborhood recreational needs.



Hiking Trails in Fort Stanton

Fort Stanton—A Grand Vista in the Nation's Capital

Fort Stanton rests at a heavily forested ridgeline site. Most of the site falls under NPS jurisdiction, although a reservoir and active recreational facilities are located in the center and are under the jurisdiction of WASA and DPR. DPR has both outdoor and indoor active recreational facilities at Fort Stanton. Recently, an outdoor baseball field has been renovated by DPR completely. The remains of Fort Stanton are on the park's west side in an area that straddles the property line between the park and Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church. The earthworks of Fort Ricketts are on the east side of the park. Specific issues and opportunities include:

- ◆ Increasing the interpretive and visitor resources associated with the Civil War and forts. One of the most significant views to downtown Washington is on the church property adjacent to the park, near where Fort Stanton stood. This view should be protected permanently and made part of the park experience.
- ◆ Improving the trails through the park and linking these to the surrounding cultural destinations, including the Frederick Douglas House and Anacostia Museum.
- ◆ Further improvements to the existing recreational amenities and recreation center to meet neighborhood needs and changing demographics.
- ◆ Preserving the stream corridor and floodplain in the interior of the park and enhancing the recreational experience in this area of the park.



Recreation amenities at Fort Stanton



Students at Cardozo Senior High School plant a Peace Garden, which includes seedlings, perennial beds, benches, bulbs, a butterfly garden, composting area, trees, and a sculpture composed of tiles made by international artists.

OBJECTIVES

Schoolyards are maintained and improved to provide diverse opportunities for learning, healthy living, and recreation, and are recognized as a vital part of Washington's parks and open-space system.