

Agency Official 106 Effect Report

*Virginia Central Railroad Trail
Fredericksburg Battlefield
Fredericksburg, Virginia*

**U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County Battlefields Memorial National Military
Park
120 Chatham Lane
Fredericksburg, Virginia 22405**

Purpose

Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County Battlefields Memorial National Military Park was authorized by an act of Congress on February 14, 1927 (44 Stat. 1091). The purpose of the park, as stated in the act, is “to commemorate the Civil War battles of Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania Court House, Wilderness, and Chancellorsville, including Salem Church...” The legislation further states that the park shall “open, construct, and repair such roads, highways, paths, and other approaches as may be necessary to make the historical points accessible...” By Executive Order 6166 in 1933 the park was transferred to the Department of the Interior to be administered by the National Park Service.

Need

The City of Fredericksburg is planning to turn the abandoned bed of the Virginia Central Railroad into a pedestrian and bicycle trail. The proposed trail will extend approximately 4.5 miles from Interstate 95 into the city, terminating near the existing railroad depot. In order to cross Hazel Run near its intersection with Lafayette Boulevard (US Business Route 1), the trail must deviate slightly from the rail bed. The City is proposing that a small segment of the trail be placed on National Park Service property, adjacent to Hazel Run and north of Lafayette Boulevard. This will require some clearing of trees and vegetation, as well as the construction of a hard surface trail. This segment of trail on National Park Service property will also include interpretive signage that will explain the history of the site and its role in the 1862 Battle of Fredericksburg.

Park Consultation

In 2009, the City of Fredericksburg first approached the park about this proposal. In the time since the initial meeting, the park and city have worked to develop a plan that would have the least amount of impact on park property. The city also funded the archaeological testing required for the proposal. Both the City and the National Park Service have been in contact with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and have consulted its representatives.

The proposal is undergoing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review through an Environmental Assessment (EA).

The proposal is being circulated among the park’s Section-106 Team of Advisors for archaeology, historical landscape architecture, and history.

The proposal is going through a 30-day public comment and review period. During that time, the proposal will be posted on the Park Service’s Planning, Environment and Public Comment website. The park has also contacted representatives of Mary Washington College’s Department of Historic Preservation, the Rappahannock Valley Civil War

Round Table, the Friends of Fredericksburg Area Battlefields, and the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust for comments.

The proposal will go through a 30-day comment and review period by the Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer.

Property Description

A. Major Physical Components - The area of the proposed project lies on the Fredericksburg Battlefield unit of the Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park. It is bordered to the west by Hazel Run, to the south by Lafayette Boulevard (US Business Route 1) and the Fredericksburg National Cemetery to the north and east. It is a wooded area with a mixture of hard woods and pines.

B. Historical Significance – The project area lies within the Fredericksburg Battlefield and is the site of Howison’s Mill. The 18th century grain mill was a prominent landmark behind just behind the Confederate front line during the December 1862 and May 1863 Battles of Fredericksburg. In addition, the mill was a prominent landmark on the path of the Union attack on Telegraph Hill and the Confederate counterattack on Marye’s Heights during the latter battle. The mill was destroyed by fire in 1894.

C. Archeological Resources – As part of this proposed project, Phase I archaeological testing of the project area was conducted by Cultural Resources, Inc. No significant resources were discovered and the area appears to have been impacted by construction Lafayette Boulevard, erosion along Hazel Run and postwar quarrying of the area.

D. Landscape Resources – The site today is heavily overgrown with 39-year old vegetation, yet during the Civil War and for many years afterward, it was cleared to facilitate the operation of the mill. The site remained clear through the 1970s. Adjacent landscape features include the mill race for Howison’s Mill, postwar quarry excavations, and abandoned road traces. None of these resources will be directly impacted by the proposed project.

Description of Alternatives

Alternative A – No Action

This option would hinder the fulfillment of the park’s legislative mandate to “open, construct, and repair such roads, highways, paths, and other approaches as may be necessary to make the historical points accessible...”

Alternative B – Looped Trail (Preferred Alternative)

Construction of the proposed trail at the site of Howison’s Mill. The project involves the clearing of approximately ¼ of an acre of woods and undergrowth. An eight-foot wide by approximately 100 yard in length paved trail will be constructed per the attached plan. It

will come up the slope from Hazel Run to the west, loop around and exit onto the Lafayette Boulevard shoulder and cross the bridge. This will require the excavation to the depth of approximately ten inches and the establishment of a crushed gravel base followed by asphalt surface. In order for the trail to be compliant with the American Disabilities Act, the trail will be in the form of a tight loop and will require some fill dirt deposited to achieve an acceptable grade.

Alternative C – Stepped Trail

This alternative would involve construction of the trail utilizing steps to ascend the slope from Hazel Run before accessing Lafayette Boulevard and the bridge. Excavation into the stream bank to accommodate stone or brick steps would be necessary, followed by excavation for an eight-foot wide, by approximately ten inches deep, by approximately 75-yard length of paved trail.

The use of steps would fail to meet standards set forth by the American Disabilities Act.

Description of Mitigation Measures

A. Cultural Resources, Inc. conducted testing at the site and failed to identify any significant features.

B. All trees and vegetation will be cut flush with the grade and stumps ground to a depth of three inches below the grade. No trees will be pulled for removal.

C. The staging area for the construction will be off park property.

D. The City of Fredericksburg will install interpretive markers and signs to explain the site's historic significance.

Effect Analysis

It is the park's opinion that this project will have "no effect" on archaeological resources and "no adverse effect" on historic resources.

Report Prepared By

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