



FINAL GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN AND
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR

CEDAR CREEK AND BELLE GROVE

NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

2010



United States Department of the Interior



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Cedar Creek and Belle Grove
National Historical Park
7718 ½ Main St., P.O. Box 700
Middletown, Virginia 22645

2010

Dear Reader:

It is with great pleasure that we provide you with a copy of the Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement for Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park (NHP). This plan is a vision for the next 15 to 20 years and will guide our management of the park in its operation and further development.

The General Management Plan is the result of more than four years of thought, planning and discussion about the National Historical Park's future, with the public and with our partners. From the start, your involvement has been critical in shaping this plan. Three public meetings were held on the draft General Management Plan in January and February 2009. During the 60-day comment period, we received 35 written comments noting issues and ideas. We have listened to your concerns and have made a number of revisions to the plan that are incorporated into the final General Management Plan presented here.

We are most grateful for the time and effort contributed to this plan by the park's partners, engaged citizens, local and regional non-profit groups, a host of county and state agencies, and dedicated National Park Service staff. The vision contained in the plan is more clear and refined because of your enthusiastic participation. To achieve the goals and objectives of the plan will require continued involvement of you, the community, and our partners. We look forward to working with all of you in coming years as we cooperate to implement the programs contained in this plan.

Since its creation in 2002, Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park has benefitted from strong community support and broad public participation. We hope that you will join with us in making this vision of the future a reality for ourselves and for future generations.

Sincerely,

Diann Jacox
Superintendent



Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement

Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park
Frederick, Shenandoah, Warren Counties, Virginia

2010

This Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement describes four alternatives for the future management of Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park, the environment that would be affected by the alternative management actions, and the environmental consequences of implementing the alternatives.

Alternative A (Continuation of Current Management) would continue the current management practices into the future. Visitors would experience the park at sites owned and independently managed by the Key Partners. The National Park Service (NPS) would provide technical assistance and bring national recognition and visibility to the park by virtue of being part of the national park system.

Under **Alternative B**, visitors would experience the park at sites owned by the Key Partners and through electronic media and NPS ranger led tours and programs. Visitors would access the park via auto-touring routes and a few non-motorized trails located primarily on Key Partner properties. The primary NPS role would be to provide interpretive programs and technical assistance. The Key Partners would have the primary responsibility for land and resource protection. There would be increased coordination among the NPS and the Key Partners, with the NPS serving as a coordinator for land and resource protection.

Under **Alternative C**, visitors would experience the park at an NPS developed and managed visitor center and at visitor focal areas owned and managed by the NPS and the Key Partners. The NPS and the Key Partners would coordinate interpretive programs at these sites. Visitors would access the park via auto-touring routes and a system of non-motorized trails that would provide opportunities for interpretation. The NPS and the Key Partners would develop a coordinated land protection plan focused on acquisition of key historic sites that would become visitor focal areas. The NPS and the Key Partners would have formal agreements to undertake special projects and general park management.

Alternative D is the **Preferred Alternative**. Under this alternative, visitors would experience the park at an NPS developed and managed visitor center and at visitor focal areas owned and managed by the NPS and the Key Partners. The NPS and the Key Partners would coordinate interpretive programs at these sites. Visitors would access the park via auto-touring routes and an extensive system of non-motorized trails that would provide opportunities for interpretation and recreation, connect focal areas, and tie to communities and resources outside the park. The NPS and the Key Partners would develop a coordinated land protection plan focused on acquisition of cultural landscapes, sensitive natural resource areas, and lands providing connections between NPS and Key Partner properties. The NPS and the Key Partners would have formal agreements that define responsibilities for special projects, programs, events, and specific park operations.

Environmental impacts that would result from implementation of the alternatives are addressed in the GMP/EIS. Impact topics addressed in this document include archeological resources, ethnographic resources, historic structures, cultural landscapes, museum collections, scenic/visual resources and viewsheds, soils, groundwater, surface water quality, vegetation, visitor use and experience, and the socioeconomic environment.

Summary

Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park (NHP) was created by Congress in December 2002 to help preserve, protect, and interpret a nationally significant Civil War landscape and antebellum plantation; to tell the rich story of Shenandoah Valley history; to preserve historic, natural, cultural, military, and scenic resources; and to serve as a focal point within the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District. The park is located in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, adjacent to the historic towns of Middletown and Strasburg, and is within the counties of Frederick, Shenandoah, and Warren. The park consists of approximately 3,713 acres that includes prehistoric resources, ecologically important areas, evidence of valley settlement and early European history of the region, examples of plantation life and culture, and significant Civil War resources.

The Battle of Cedar Creek had a direct impact on the course of the Civil War, nearly eliminating Confederate military presence in the Valley. Substantial portions of the Cedar Creek Battlefield lie within the park, including historic landscapes, structures, monuments, river fords, military encampments, and avenues of approach. Early European settlement is evident in the park, notably the Valley Pike that has been a major roadway throughout its history, from a prehistoric hunting path, to a wagon road, to a turnpike, to a U.S. highway. The park contains significant examples of the valley's antebellum agricultural community, including manor houses, farmsteads, mills, and a complex network of road traces that reflect the economic and social fabric of the rural community. Belle Grove, Harmony Hall, and Long Meadow, the plantation homes of the Hite and Bowman families, are three impressive historic structures in the park that speak to the power and influence of the slaveholding class – despite being a distinct minority west of the Blue Ridge – during the antebellum period. The natural landscapes and resources of the park offer visitors opportunities for quiet and solitude in an ever-expanding suburban area. Cedar Creek and the Shenandoah River, limestone upland habitats, and cave and karst features in the park provide regionally and nationally significant opportunities for visitor enjoyment and scientific study.

Cedar Creek and Belle Grove NHP is a partnership park, currently with limited property in federal ownership, that works collaboratively with other entities including Belle Grove, Inc., the Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Shenandoah County, and the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation. These legislated Key Partners provide the foundation for protecting, preserving, and interpreting park resources by virtue of their ownership of significant acreage within the park, their commitment to a shared preservation ethic, their willingness to provide visitor services and public access, and their consent to manage their property as part of the national historical park. The National Park Service (NPS) also cooperates with its community partners – the towns of Middletown and Strasburg, and the counties of Frederick, Shenandoah, and

Warren – to further the purposes of the park. As a partnership park, the success of this plan is not solely determined by the NPS; instead, the plan's success depends upon the will, perseverance, and cooperation of all those who have the authority and desire to implement it and ascribe to a unified vision for managing the park. It is incumbent upon the NPS, the Key Partners, and the surrounding communities to engage each other in the management of the park to protect landscapes and viewsheds, maintain the rural character of the area, and manage the park as a contiguous whole rather than islands of resources.

The area around Cedar Creek and Belle Grove NHP is changing rapidly. Frederick, Shenandoah, and Warren counties are now considered to be within the Washington, D.C. commuting area, which has sparked dramatic growth in the region, particularly along the I-66 corridor. Between 2000 and 2005 the population growth rate in these three counties has been nearly twice that of the rest of Virginia. Agricultural land uses have declined while conversion of land to commercial and residential uses is on the rise. There are new residential developments within and adjacent to the park. I-81 and the I-81/I-66 interchange are slated for upgrades by the highway department, likely leading to road widening that will consume park land. A limestone quarry along the northern boundary of the park has plans for an expansion that would nearly double its size, and a major power transmission line may be built within the park's viewshed. All of these changes affect the ability of the NPS and the Key Partners to preserve the park landscapes, rural character, and scenic views that the enabling legislation seeks to protect. As stated in the park's significance statement these are: "The panoramic views of the mountains, natural areas, and waterways provide visitors with an inspiring setting of great natural beauty. The historic, natural, cultural, military, and scenic resources...are nationally and regionally significant."

Other changes have been favorable. The Key Partners now own and protect about a third of the land within the park boundary, preserving historic resources, maintaining open space, and protecting unique natural resources.

Alternatives Considered

This document is a final general management plan and environmental impact statement (GMP/EIS) for Cedar Creek and Belle Grove NHP. The GMP provides the NPS and the Key Partners with the necessary framework to guide the management of the park for the next 15 to 20 years. This is the first GMP for the park; it is intended to be a useful, long-term decision-making tool, providing a logical and trackable rationale for decisions about protection and public use of park resources.

This final GMP presents four alternatives for the management, use, and development of Cedar Creek and Belle Grove NHP; all alternatives are intended to protect natural and cultural resources while serving the needs of park visitors. It is important to note that under all alternatives the private landowners within the park

retain the same rights and responsibilities as their counterparts outside the park's legislated boundary, and the GMP does not in any way abrogate or take the property rights of private landowners or nonprofit organizations.

The four alternatives, described briefly here, were developed around the need to define an appropriate role for the NPS at the park. The alternatives present differing visions for how the NPS and the Key Partners would manage the park.

- **Alternative A.** Under this alternative, current management practices would generally continue as they are today and visitors would experience the park as they do today with few management changes. Belle Grove Plantation and the Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation Headquarters would be the primary destinations within the park. Occasional small group tours would be offered at Harmony Hall. Visitors would visit these sites and learn the stories of the Battle of Cedar Creek and antebellum plantation life. Some visitors would be interested in exploring the park, which they would do on their own using information obtained from sources other than the NPS. No wayfinding would be provided and because most land would remain in private ownership, visitors would not be able to view sites other than from public rights-of-way.

Visitors would generally not perceive the park as a unit of the national park system. The NPS would continue to minimally staff the park and maintain a small administrative office. The primary role of the NPS would be to provide technical assistance to the Key Partners, the Community Partners, and private landowners regarding preservation of historic and natural resources.

The Key Partners would independently assume responsibilities for interpretation, resource protection, and visitor services, and would maintain visitor contact facilities on their properties.

While there would be no limit to land acreage that could be acquired under this alternative (or any of the other alternatives), it is not expected that there would be a significant change in the amount of park land owned by the Key Partners or by the NPS.

- **Alternative B.** In Alternative B, the cultural heritage and natural history stories of the park would be told through interpretive media and programs offered by the Key Partners and the NPS at existing sites, with opportunities for visitors to explore rural areas of the park on interpretive self-guided auto routes. Belle Grove Plantation, the Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation Headquarters, and the Keister Tract would be the primary destinations within the park. Regular small group tours would be offered at Harmony Hall. Auto routes in the park's rural areas would have wayfinding signage, a wayside pull-off, and supporting interpretive materials made available at the Key Partner sites as well as through the internet. Visitors would also explore Belle Grove

Plantation and lands owned by the Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation on non-motorized trails. All of the park's stories would be told at sites throughout the park.

Most visitors would perceive the park as a unit of the national park system. NPS rangers would offer interpretive programs and activities at the Key Partner sites and possibly other properties in the park, as requested. The NPS would provide technical assistance to the Key Partners, the Community Partners, and private landowners regarding preservation of historic and natural resources within the park. The NPS would rehabilitate and adaptively reuse the farmhouse and barn at the Hite-Whitham Farm. NPS park offices would be located outside the park or perhaps at 8693 Valley Pike.

The NPS and the Key Partners would develop a coordinated interpretive program that would identify the primary interpretive themes and their related stories, as well as places in the park where those stories would be told. There would be an informal collaborative relationship regarding natural and cultural resource protection. Written agreements would be entered into for special projects and management programs. Additionally, other non-profit preservation organizations and land trusts would advocate for the park and assist the NPS in accomplishing its mission.

While the Key Partners would continue to purchase high-priority tracts of land, the current land status – about a third of the park owned and protected from development by the Key Partners – would not be expected to change significantly under Alternative B.

- **Alternative C.** In Alternative C, the park's cultural heritage and natural history stories would be told at a central location with a unified message; this central hub would orient visitors to the park, the operations of the NPS and the Key Partners, and the National Historic District. Focal areas elsewhere in the park would provide immersion experiences where stories would be told in more depth. Focal areas would include the existing Key Partner sites at Belle Grove Plantation, the Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation Headquarters, Harmony Hall, and the Keister Tract. Several additional focal areas would be added as historically significant sites are acquired. Visitors would travel to focal areas via auto routes with wayfinding signage, several wayside pull-offs, and supporting interpretive materials made available at the Key Partner sites as well as through the internet. Visitors would also explore the park on trails that connect lands owned by the Key Partners and the NPS and that follow the course of the Battle of Cedar Creek and the historic mill road network. All of the park's stories would be told at sites throughout the park.

Visitors would perceive the park as a unit of the national park system. NPS rangers would offer interpretive programs and activities at its visitor's center

and at NPS-owned focal areas, and at Key Partner sites and other properties in the Park, as may be requested. The NPS would provide technical assistance to the Key Partners, the Community Partners, and private landowners regarding preservation of historic and natural resources within and in proximity to the park, as well as its viewsheds. The NPS would rehabilitate and adaptively reuse the farmhouse and barn at the Hite-Whitham Farm for visitor interpretation and park operations. NPS park offices would be located at a visitor center and perhaps at 8693 Valley Pike.

The NPS and the Key Partners would develop a coordinated interpretive program that would utilize the primary interpretive themes and their related stories, as well as identify places in the park where those stories would be told. There would be an informal collaborative relationship regarding natural and cultural resource protection. Written agreements would be entered into for special projects and special management programs. Additionally, other non-profit preservation organizations and land trusts would advocate for the park and assist the NPS in accomplishing its mission.

The NPS and Key Partners would acquire land from willing sellers, providing resource protection at key historic sites that would become visitor focal areas.

- **Alternative D.** In Alternative D, the park's cultural heritage and natural history stories would be told at a central location with a unified message. This central hub would orient visitors to the park, the operations of the NPS and the Key Partners, and the National Historic District; this hub would support educational programs, research, and other activities that help the park realize its special mandates for resource conservation. Focal areas within protected cultural landscapes elsewhere in the park would provide immersion experiences where stories would be told in more depth. Focal areas would include the existing Key Partner sites at Belle Grove Plantation, the Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation Headquarters, Harmony Hall, and the Keister Tract. Several additional focal areas would be added as historically significant sites and adjoining cultural landscapes are acquired. Visitors would travel to focal areas via auto routes with wayfinding signage, wayside pull-offs, and supporting interpretive materials made available at NPS and Key Partner sites as well as through the internet. Visitors would also explore the park on trails that connect lands owned by the Key Partners and the NPS, that follow the course of the Battle of Cedar Creek and the historic mill road network, and that connect to the towns of Middletown and Strasburg and the George Washington National Forest. All of the park's stories would be told at sites throughout the park.

Visitors would perceive the park as a unit of the national park system. NPS rangers would offer interpretive programs and activities at its visitor's center and at NPS-owned focal areas, and at Key Partner sites and other properties in

and outside the Park, as may be requested. The NPS would provide technical assistance to the Key Partners, the Community Partners, and private landowners regarding preservation of historic and natural resources within and in proximity to the park, as well as protection of the park's viewsheds and related resources outside the park boundary. The NPS would rehabilitate and adaptively reuse the farmhouse and barn at the Hite-Whitham Farm for visitor interpretation and park operations. NPS park offices would be located within a visitor center and perhaps at 8693 Valley Pike.

The NPS and the Key Partners would develop a coordinated interpretive program that would utilize the primary interpretive themes and their related stories, as well as identify places in the park where those stories would be told. There would be a formal relationship among the NPS and the Key Partners regarding resource management, interpretive programs, and park operations. Additionally, other non-profit preservation organizations and land trusts would advocate for the park and assist the NPS in accomplishing its mission.

Protection of the park's resources would emphasize acquisition from willing sellers of cultural landscapes, sensitive natural resources, and connections between lands owned by the NPS and Key Partners.

The GMP proposes six management zones in the park that are common to the three action alternatives (Alternatives B, C, and D). Management zones are a tool that defines desired conditions and appropriate management and development for geographic regions within the park. For each zone a land protection strategy is proposed. A more detailed land protection plan that will identify priorities for protecting land within the park and the tools to accomplish protection goals will be developed by the NPS and the Key Partners following the completion of the GMP.

Environmental Consequences of the Alternatives

Impacts to the environment under these alternatives would be generally beneficial, particularly under Alternatives C and D.

The action alternatives propose different visions for achieving the goals of providing visitor services, protecting park resources, preserving the landscapes of the park, and helping the public understand the unique experience of the Battle of Cedar Creek and the Civil War in the Shenandoah Valley. With the increased land ownership and staffing called for under Alternatives C and D, there is an increased ability to accomplish these goals. Additionally, the action alternatives call for an increasing amount of collaboration with the Key Partners. With increased personnel and coordination, the NPS and the Key Partners would be better equipped to develop and implement proactive land protection strategies for resource preservation within and outside park boundaries.

Specific environmental impacts associated with the alternatives are described in Chapter 4 of the GMP.

Agency Preferred Alternative – Alternative D

The NPS has identified Alternative D as the preferred alternative to guide long-term management of Cedar Creek and Belle Grove NHP. Selection of Alternative D as the preferred alternative is based on the analysis and findings of the GMP planning team as well as on public comments received during the planning process. The GMP planning team has determined that Alternative D would fulfill the NPS statutory mission and responsibilities at the park and would be advantageous when compared to Alternatives A, B, and C with respect to protecting the park's natural and cultural resources; enhancing interpretation, education, and public understanding; enhancing public use and enjoyment of the park; effectively managing the park; and providing effective technical assistance to the park's partners and landowners.

The Next Steps

Following distribution of the final plan and a 30-day no-action period, a record of decision approving the final plan will be signed by the NPS regional director. The record of decision documents the NPS selection of an alternative for implementation. Once it is signed, the plan can then be implemented.

Implementation of the Plan

The implementation of the approved plan, no matter which alternative, will depend not only on future NPS funding and servicewide priorities, but also on partnership funds, time, and effort. The approval of a GMP does not guarantee that funding and staffing needed to implement the plan will be forthcoming. Full implementation of the plan could be many years in the future.

Once the GMP has been approved, additional feasibility studies and more detailed planning, environmental documentation, and consultations would be completed, as appropriate, before certain actions in the selected alternative can be carried out. Future program and implementation plans, describing specific actions that managers intend to undertake and accomplish, will tier from the desired conditions and long-term goals set forth in this general management plan.

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How to Read This Plan...

The National Park Service (NPS) has developed this Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement to guide management decision making at Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park for the next 15 to 20 years. The public and many local, state, and federal agencies have assisted the NPS with preparing the plan. This plan is divided into five chapters:

Chapter 1 – Purpose of and Need for Action describes the federal action and reasons why the general management plan (GMP) is being prepared. Chapter 1 presents the park's purpose and significance statements and describes the fundamental and other important resources and values that are critical to achieving the park's purpose and maintaining its significance. This section also describes the planning process and issues that are addressed in the plan.

Chapter 2 – Alternatives describes, evaluates, and compares the Continuation of Current Management Alternative and three action alternatives. The Continuation of Current Management Alternative (Alternative A) provides a baseline from which the three action alternatives (B, C, and D) can be evaluated. Desired resource conditions, opportunities for visitor experience, as well as levels of development intensity necessary to accomplish each alternative are presented. Alternative D is the agency preferred alternative and the environmentally preferred alternative.

Chapter 3 – Affected Environment describes the existing natural, cultural, and socioeconomic resources that could be potentially affected by implementing either one of the alternatives.

Chapter 4 – Environmental Consequences describes the potential impacts to the park's resource values that could result from implementing any of the alternatives.

Chapter 5 – Consultation and Coordination describes the public involvement and agency coordination process that occurred during the GMP planning process.

Appendices provide additional supporting technical data and relevant background material cited throughout the plan.

References are books and documents from which background and supporting information was obtained.

