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OUR OPINION

Irony of Bristow's fate not lost on reenactors

On Sunday, hundreds of reenactors will flock to Prince William County's James S. Long Park, converging near Haymarket for the Civil War drama staged there each summer. The reenactment, with its smoke and guns and sword play, has become a popular tradition, drawing thousands of paying customers who watch, review and cheer on the troops.

This year, however, a weird incongruity is at work in this annual affair. The mock battle to be commemorated Sunday will echo, on a much smaller scale, the fierce fight Yankees and Confederates waged on Oct. 14, 1863 just a few miles to the south. Today, that 1,100-acre patch of Piedmont — which looks virtually as it did 130 years ago — is about to go under the bulldozer blade.

So it is that a county which reaps tourism dollars from a sham Battle of Bristoe Station is prepared to sacrifice the ground on which the genuine article was fought, ground that still holds the remains of the soldiers who died during that terrible campaign.

Incredibly, the General Assembly — goaded by greed-crazed landowners and state Sen. Charles J. Colgan, D-Prince William — went so far as to insist that the site be expunged from the registers of state and national historic landmarks.

But there's a slender ray of hope. Prince William planners are proposing a land-use plan amendment that could soften development's blows on the Bristow battlefield's pristine historic landscape. Question is, will the county supervisors approve it? And if so, can this voluntary program reorient builders and property owners who have shown little sensitivity for the land and its heritage? We urge you to attend the county's Sept. 13 public hearing on the proposal, learn more and speak out.