

Park will remove 'eyesore' power lines

"VA"

By CHRISTOPHER DOLAN
Journal staff writer

A series of 100-foot-plus power lines through the Manassas National Battlefield Park will be relocated to protect the park's historical integrity, officials said.

More than one mile of the highly visible poles in the Stuart's Hill and Brawner Farm sections of the battlefield would be affected under the proposal.

"This relocation would remove the power lines from the historic scene, significantly improving our ability to interpret the Second Battle of Manassas," said park management assistant Karen Cucurullo.

The National Park Service is considering two alternatives for relocation of the power lines, one to the park's edge and the second through residential property near Pageland Lane.

The project, which is required under the land purchase agreement ex-

ecuted by the Park Service would cost between \$4 million and \$24 million, depending on whether the lines are left inside the park or relocated to residential property. All the funding will be provided by the federal government. The agreement calls for removal of all equipment from the Stuart's Hill area.

Park superintendent Kenneth Apschnikat said the less expensive option would be to reroute lines within the park for about \$4.5 million.

"Rerouting the lines within the park would be the least disruptive to the public and the most cost-effective plan," said Apschnikat. "It's the logical and right thing to do."

John Bailey, Virginia Power's director of engineering services, agreed that keeping the power lines within the park is the best alternative.

"We think we've found a route that minimizes the impact of power

lines on the residential neighborhood," said Bailey, who is confident that rerouting the lines through the park would not create an eyesore for area residents.

The second alternative, moving the structures behind Pageland Lane residences, is really not an option, said Apschnikat.

Relocating the towers outside the park would cost \$24 million. The power line structures stand 90 to 120 feet tall with crossarms 50 to 90 feet wide.

Pageland Lane resident Judith Simpson already has power lines traversing her back yard and doesn't want another eyesore in the vicinity of her property.

"I thought they were putting them underground," said Simpson. "I don't want them here. I've always been concerned about possible

health problems from power lines."

Recent research into electromagnetic fields has been inconclusive with respect to what, if any, health hazards are associated with high-power transmission lines.

Running the power lines underground would cost an estimated \$36 million, nine times the price of relocating the lines above ground officials said.

Since purchasing the Stuart's Hill tract in 1988, the federal government has spent about \$118 million to remove existing structures from the land, Apschnikat said.

The National Park Service is reviewing its options and will make a decision after Aug. 19. Public comment about the line relocation should be directed to the Manassas National Battlefield Park at 754-1861.

PW Journal 6/29-30/94

"VA"

Grave robbing prompts park land purchase bill

By TONI CARPIO
of the Potomac News

Officials in the U.S. Department of Interior have filed an emergency land acquisition for the Manassas National Battlefield Park in a "declaration of taking" with the Congressional Environment and Natural Resources committee.

The emergency request is separate from a financial bill which awaits Senate action. Artifact hunters have been digging on the Brawner farm, and have made the park officials aware of the specific artillery position of Col. S.D. Lee in 1862. The "friction primers," artillery remnants, were discovered this spring.

"Even more serious is the opening of an unmarked battlefield grave," stated Park Superintendent Rolland Swain in his subse-

quent emergency land acquisition request.

"(It) contained the skeletal remains of a soldier wrapped in a uniform, several Virginia Military Institute buttons and a bullet that possibly killed the young man," he said.

The National Battlefield Park's new boundary lines, approved in late 1980, incorporated the Brawner Farm tract, the site of the Second Battle of Manassas. The tract is top on the list of acquisition priorities for the park's land protection plan of October, 1983.

"The principal owner is willing to sell," said Mr. Swain, whose office has been trying to negotiate acquisition of the land since 1980, with some 17 owning family mem-

—See GRAVE, Page A5

GRAVE / From A1

bers. Mr. Swain said the principal owner hopes the Congressional "declaration of taking" will go through, both to free him of the burden of taxes and to assure that no development would occur.

The property, owned by Walker Davis, was on Prince William County's delinquent tax list when concerned residents lobbied for the purchase of the land in April of 1983. Congress had authorized funds for the purchase of about 1,400 acres in 1980, the Department of Interior stalled the plan.

Because nearby landowners have been assured the government will purchase their land, they have had difficulty finding other buyers to take over the tax burden.

President Reagan kept a long-overdue promise in his request for \$2.5 million for fiscal 1984, for the purchase of adjacent land. Sen. John Warner (R-Va.) the acquisition bill's patron, increased the request to \$3 million last month. This bill awaits Senate action.

While the unauthorized digging continues, the battlefield park lose the ability to ascertain specific locations of battle lines and other historical knowledge. The digging is taking place on the battlefield tract, while the owners are not occupying the site.

Mr. Swain's request now rests with the Environmental and Natural Resources Authorizing Committee and both House and Senate Interior subcommittees.