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# METRO

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MANASSAS NATIONAL

HISTORIC SITE FILE: **BATTLEFIELD PARK**

PRINCE WILLIAM PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM **B**

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## D.C. School Choice Program Offers Few Options

By BILL TURQUE  
Washington Post Staff Writer

Earlier this month, parents of students in 81 low-performing D.C. public schools — almost two-thirds of the District system — got a packet in the mail announcing that federal law entitles them to transfer their children to a stronger school. The notice goes out every Au-

gust, required under the federal No Child Left Behind law. But in a system filled with failing schools, parental choice can be a hollow proposition. Perhaps that's why officials reported Friday that they had received just 34 applications for transfer. The deadline is tomorrow.

"What a joke," LaCrisha Butler said. Butler is one of the few who is

pushing ahead. She wants to pull her nephew, Travis, out of Coolidge High School, which this year failed, for the fifth time in a row, to hit math and reading test benchmarks required by the law.

The eight other mainstream high schools he might attend also are under federal mandate to restructure and improve. That leaves the District's five "specialty" high schools:

the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, McKinley Tech, Banneker, Phelps and School Without Walls. All have admission requirements that pose significant obstacles for Travis, a special-needs child who has an individualized education plan.

Younger students face a similarly narrow band of choices. Alternative schools must be academically sound

and sufficiently secure so they are not deemed "persistently dangerous," as defined by D.C. law. The nearly 5,000 children in the District's 11 floundering middle and junior high schools have just two choices under the No Child Left Behind option: Deal and Hardy.

For the nearly 20,000 children at

See SCHOOLS, B3, Col. 4.

## Trees Lose on Manassas Battlefield



BY SUSAN BIDDLE — THE WASHINGTON POST

Federal and Prince William County officials want to preserve views of Manassas National Battlefield Park, where surrounding development has altered historic vistas. Above, traffic on Route 29 rolls through the fast-growing county, where 140 acres of rare oak trees on the Civil War site were cut down to restore the battlefield's sightlines.

### National Park and Pr. William Officials Try to Restore Civil War-Era Views

By KRISTEN MACK  
Washington Post Staff Writer

There is Jackson, sitting astride his mount, Little Sorrel, surveying vistas of rolling fields, towering signs, high-voltage power lines and trees.

The iconic statue of Thomas "Stone-wall" Jackson commemorates the place

where he inspired Confederate troops to victory. Federal and Prince William County officials want to preserve views of Manassas National Battlefield Park. There's not much they can do about the signs and power lines. But the trees? They can go.

More than 140 acres of rare oak trees on the Civil War site were getting in the

way of historic vistas of the last Union assault at the second battle of Manassas. So the National Park Service cut them down.

Preserving Prince William's physical battlefields is no longer enough. Historians want to re-create historic battlefields so visitors can see the land the same way that those who fought in the

Civil War would have seen it.

Staff members from the park and the county's planning department are studying how to protect views on the battlefield. The study will attempt to guide future development outside park grounds and potentially limit road construction

See PARK, B4, Col. 1



## Virginia

# Park Officials Try to Restore Historic Views

PARK. From B1

and the heights of office parks, apartment buildings and billboards. "It's crucial to the public understanding of what happened. It helps give the public a sense of place," said Ray Brown, the park's cultural resource manager. "That's difficult to do when your surrounding context is changing so rapidly."

But some county officials and historians question whether it's worth sacrificing progress — and possibly more trees — to recreate history.

"The 'view shed' concept is extending itself beyond the battlefield. That's worrisome," Manassas City Council member Jonathan Way said. "The Park Service is getting into land-use and development beyond its geographic responsibility."

Prince William officials are in the process of documenting view sheds — the area an individual can see from a given point — with the help of a \$60,000 grant from the American Battlefield Protection Pro-

gram. The 5,100-acre park sits at routes 29 and 234. Its trails and fields are popular among history buffs, nature lovers, wildflower enthusiasts, birders and equestrians. And although that sort of activity is expected in a park setting, another activity, perhaps more closely associated with the battlefield, is strictly out of bounds.

Civil War reenactments are not allowed on federal land. That's left some critics questioning the effort to restore Manassas Battlefield to its original landscape, when it was actively cultivated farmland.

With 88 of the 384 Civil War sites under Park Service jurisdiction, Manassas Battlefield serves as a proving ground for historic sites threatened by development. Joan M. Zenzen says in "Batling for Manassas," a book about the longstanding preservation struggle at the park.

This is the first time Prince William has identified views of military significance at the battlefield, home

of the first major land battle of the Civil War. It is undertaking the task after a period of unprecedented growth, which has made the land beyond the battlefield more valuable.

So far, park officials and county planners, along with the county's archaeologist, have identified 15 historically based view sheds, representing the first and second battles of Manassas. The park also has 10 public vantage points, among them Henry Hill, where the visitor's center sits. By the end of the year, the county will prepare a preservation plan and recommend ways to enhance views.

Board of County Supervisors Chairman Corey A. Stewart said Prince William has a generational obligation to protect the park. "The battlefield is the county's most important historical resource," said Stewart (R-At Large). "We have to make sure whatever development happens along the I-466 corridor is not seen in order to protect the integrity of the battlefield."

The Park Service has never tried to "run roughshod" over the county's interest or plans, Stewart said, so the county should allow the study to proceed without "political interference."

Even as new development in the fast-growing county encroaches on the battlefield, the Park Service has sought to preserve and replicate the landscape from the Civil War era. A costly and bitter fight took place in 1988 over a plan to build a mall next to the battlefield. It resulted in the federal government taking the land. Five years later, the Walt Disney Co. came knocking. It wanted to build a \$650 million historical theme park just outside the battle-



Workers clear debris from an area of Manassas National Battlefield Park, where trees were cut down last year to restore Civil War-era views.

that the trees needed to come down to maintain a sense of authenticity at the site.

The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality declared the "basic oak-hickory forest type," which is limited to a six-county area in Northern Virginia and Maryland, globally uncommon to rare. The department recommended alternatives to cutting the forest down as part of its environmental assessment.

The Park Service, which is part of the U.S. Department of the Interior, solicited comment from the public and state agencies when it released its draft general management plan and environmental impact statement. But the federal agency ultimately controls what happens on its grounds.

"What we have is a compromise. It's not a complete restoration. We know we can't take it back to the way it was during the Civil War," Brown said. "It presents a conflict

between managing natural and historic resources."

James I. Robertson Jr., a Virginia Tech history professor, said he understands the importance of restoring the landscape as a way to help tell the story of what happened during the two battles.

"The field has got to be preserved — that's non-debatable," he said. Cutting down trees is the equivalent to "committing one of the 10 deadly sins. That used to be a major no-no."

The Park Service's attempt to hold on to its land is a worthy battle, Robertson said, he's just not sure how practical it is to try to maintain views.

"You can't stop progress in that respect. You can't stunt the ground simply to protect views. I think that's unrealistic," he said. "When you are dealing with a developer's dollar, it's generally a no-win situation. County boards are moved by tax dollars more than respect for history."

