

Residents worry over vandalism at the Park

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Vandals spray-painted graffiti on several historic sites at the Manassas National Battlefield Park sometime during the July Fourth weekend. The James Robinson House, which survived the First Battle of Manassas and served as a field hospital during the Second Battle of Manassas, and several interpretive signs in different areas of the park were marred with black paint.

According to the Park Superintendent Ken Apschnikat, all the graffiti has been removed. "We try to get to it as soon as possible so it doesn't encourage more," he said.

Last weekend's vandalisms came after several gravestones at the park's Confederate Cemetery were desecrated with cult symbols in June.

While some neighbors of the park point to recent vandalism as another sign of a crime problem in the 5,000-acre national park, Apschnikat said that vandalism problems usually come in spells — "There will be a rash of vandalism and then for a long time nothing," he said.

"It's not that unusual either. (Vandalism) happens at national parks across the country," Apschnikat said.

Betty Duley, however, feels that the recent vandalism could indicate the start of a more serious problem.

Duley lives on land abutting the Battlefield Park and in February she became involved in forming an organization called Park for All Americans. Duley is the vice chairman of the group.

"It was formed as part of the neighborhood watch program," she said. The organization's goal is to make the park safe and accessible to everyone.

Duley along with other citizens point to the recent vandalism as proof of the necessity for the mounted horse patrols — currently a controversial issue which had been under study by the Department of Interior during February and March.

In March nearly 70 park users and area residents attended a public session with the task force which was assessing the horse patrols. Most supported the patrols saying



The historic James Robinson House, above, located at the Manassas National Battlefield Park, was spray-painted by vandals over the holiday weekend. The house survived the First Battle of Manassas and served a Union hospital during the Second Battle of Manassas. Below, one of the signs which provides historic information to park visitors, is one of the several signs also marred by graffiti.



that the only way to deter crime in the large park is through the mounted patrols. Crime problems they cited include drug dealing, illegal sex and poaching.

"It is my opinion that horses are the only way to go," Duley said. "And apparently this (vandalism) shows that the park needs 24-hour patrol."

In a letter to the editor supporting the horse patrols, Gregg C. Jones, a nine-year volunteer with the Battlefield Park states, "You can clean up some of the vandalism

(those gravestones will need a sandblaster) but can you afford to wait until the damage is irreversible and the possibility of harm to innocent park visitors occurs?"

The Journal Messenger filed a Freedom of Information request for the horse patrol study, which was rejected by the Department of Interior. The newspaper then filed an appeal, which is currently under consideration. The Department asked for an extension of the 20 days it had to respond to the FOI appeal because of the large number of FOI actions filed with the agency.