

**Journal  
Messenger**

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**Editorial****Public must demand  
better stewardship  
of the Battlefield**

Enough is enough. Anyone who puts their personal politics and petty animosities aside will agree that the situation at the Manassas Battlefield needs an immediate and decisive resolution.

Bickering should be put aside. Too many people spend too much time with old animosities that arose during the fight over federal purchase of the park land in place of a shopping center. Those days are gone. Wallowing in petty, parochial fights like that are embarrassing in light of the current problems at the Battlefield.

Maneuvering and backbiting over the horse patrols is also counterproductive. Those who think the patrols are an overly expensive perk for federal retirees, political big wigs and the equestrian set may be partially correct in their criticism. But the critics must ask themselves: "How should the park be policed and how would I look at the problem if I lived next door to it."

In our opinion, the primary concern should be the fact that the Manassas Battlefield is well on its way to becoming a poor federal neighbor.

Ken Apschnikat's record as a park manager is stained by the increasing instances of vandalism and the seeming inability of the Parks Service to discourage its use as a cruising and meeting spot for homosexuals. He has demonstrated what we think is a woefully inept attitude toward public and press relations, preserving the reputation of the park and promoting its status as a quality national park.

Whether those problems are the result of Mr. Apschnikat's inability as a manager or the effects of the misdirection the Parks Service and Department of Interior makes little different.

The situation is deteriorating and it must be changed. If the park is in fact hallowed historical ground, it is being desecrated by vandals.

Manassas Battlefield should be the gem of Western Prince William's tourist attractions. It can have that status, but not without some dedication and leadership from both the Parks Service and the Department of Interior.

The people of Manassas, Western Prince William and the tourists who visit the area deserve better than what the current management of the park is demonstrating.

The best way to stimulate change is set aside parochial differences and demonstrate a strong, united public outrage to those who are charged with stewardship of the park and those who have oversight over that process. That group includes the National Parks Service, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt and Virginia's congressional delegation.

Babbitt made a big deal out of stopping the expansion of the horse stables at the Battlefield. He called that project an example of wasteful spending. It would be interesting to hear his opinion on the burning of a Battlefield landmark, increasing vandalism and public disgust of inadequate park policing.

*Opinions expressed in this space and labeled as "Editorial" are those of the Journal Messenger. Other opinions expressed in the letters to the editor, columns, commentary and cartoons are the opinions of their authors and artists.*