

**Testimony of David N. Duncan, President  
American Battlefield Trust**

**Before the Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
United States House of Representatives  
July 13, 2023**

**Introduction**

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the subcommittee: thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is David Duncan, and I am the president of the American Battlefield Trust. I come before you today to respectfully request passage by this committee of the *American Battlefield Protection Program Enhancement Act (H.R. 3448)*.

The American Battlefield Trust is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving America's Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War battlefields. Thanks to the generosity of our 300,000 members and supporters, the Trust has protected more than 57,000 acres of critically important battlefield land in 25 states. We could not have performed our mission without the support of Congress and the National Park Service; and specifically, the American Battlefield Protection Program.

This legislation before you today, which currently includes a bipartisan list of more than 40 cosponsors, would take an already successful federal program, and make it even more efficient and effective, ensuring the preservation, restoration and interpretation of our nation's most hallowed grounds as an enduring legacy of the America 250 observance in 2026.

**American Battlefield Protection Program**

America's battlefields are irreplaceable parts of our shared national heritage. When preserved, these battlefields serve as outdoor classrooms to educate current and future generations about the defining moments in our country's history. They are living memorials, not just to the soldiers who fought and died there, but to all who have proudly worn our nation's uniform. Preserved battlefields are also economic drivers for communities, generating tourism dollars that are extremely important to state and local economies. Battlefield visitors, who typically travel in groups and as part of families, tend to stay longer and spend more than other types of tourists.

The American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) has been THE key tool of the past nearly quarter century to ensure these hallowed grounds are preserved for generations to come. The program traces its origins to 1990, when Congress created the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission (CWSAC), which produced a report outlining the most important Civil War battlegrounds, prioritizing them according to preservation status and historic significance. In addition, the Commission also recommended that Congress establish a federal matching grant program to encourage private sector investment in battlefield preservation. In 2007, a similar report was submitted to Congress by the National Park Service (NPS), identifying the key battlefields of the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. To date, ABPP's Battlefield Land

Acquisition Grants have been used to preserve more than 35,000 acres of previously unprotected battlefield land from these three formative conflicts.

### **Enhancing a Successful Program**

ABPP is a program that *works*. It is responsible for one of the best public private preservation partnerships in the country. The Trust and our partners—from Fort Ticonderoga, New York to Glorieta Pass, New Mexico; from Princeton, New Jersey to Vicksburg, Mississippi—have put this program to work to preserve battlefields from the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War. This bill, introduced by Representatives Elise Stefanik (NY) and Gerry Connolly (VA), would make an already nimble and effective program even stronger. And with the nation's 250th anniversary less than three years away, it is imperative we do everything we can to save the places where America was forged, including strengthening the tools at our disposal to ensure our nation's history is preserved and its stories told.

This bill would make four minor but critical updates to the program. The first modification would enable non-profits and Native American tribes to apply directly for the land acquisition grants. At present, the only applicants for these grants are state and local public entities; nonprofits like the Trust must find a government pass through to submit the applications, which can often add months to the application process, jeopardizing land deals with willing sellers who typically wish to sell their properties quickly. State and local governments would still be eligible to apply, but the elimination of this hurdle would save time and lessen the public staff burden.

The second revision to the existing authorization would create a mechanism for NPS to modify existing core and study battlefield area boundaries to include new or updated information about the actions that took place at these sites. Periodical updates to the reports, issued in 1993 and 2007, would ensure that new, authoritative research about the historic extent of battlefields, obtained through advances in technology or archaeology since the reports were first published, can be incorporated by the NPS so that these lands would be eligible for acquisition, interpretation and restoration grants administered by ABPP.

The final two elements of this bill would guarantee that these funds will be used exclusively for the preservation and restoration of high-priority battlefield land. As written, the current ABPP statute allows land grants to be used for all sites listed in the 2007 *Report to Congress on the Historic Preservation of Revolutionary War and War of 1812 Sites in the United States*. This report includes not only battlefields, but non-battlefield associated sites related to these conflicts – structures, ships and other landmarks in many cases are not on battlefield land. This modification would amend the statute to limit Battlefield Land Acquisition Grants to battlefield land, as the Congress intended when the Revolutionary War and War of 1812 battlefields were added to the program in 2014, and as is currently the case for Civil War battlefields.

Finally, the bill would modify the relatively new Battlefield Restoration Grant program, authorized by Congress in 2019, to allow that program to be utilized for all protected battlefield listed in the two aforementioned reports. Current statute limits these grants, which are designed to restore battlefield lands to their wartime appearance by removing non-historic structures and reclaiming other features such as road traces and tree lines, to land saved with ABPP Battlefield

Land Acquisition Grants, excluding many previously preserved sites across the country. The proposed change would allow for sites previously protected – Picacho Peak in Arizona, Brandywine Battlefield in Pennsylvania, and Sailors Creek, Virginia, to name a few – to utilize these funds, ensuring that more battlefield parks can take advantage of this valuable program to improve the interpretive experience and enable visitors to connect with American history through the power of place.

## **Conclusion**

These small but important modifications to the American Battlefield Protection Program will ensure its readiness to preserve American historic treasures as we approach our nation's 250th birthday. The Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the Civil War were defining moments in our country's history. They are open spaces and outdoor classrooms that commemorate the sacrifices of those who fought and died on these hallowed fields. The American Battlefield Protection Program remains an irreplaceable tool with widespread support from Congress for the past quarter century, and this bill will strengthen this program for years to come.

Chairman Tiffany and Ranking Member Neguse, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of the bill. I sincerely hope you and your subcommittee will support the *American Battlefield Protection Program Enhancement Act* (H.R. 3448). We look forward to continuing to work closely with you as we continue our important work to preserve America's sacred battlefield lands. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee.