

Conservation Efforts Move Forward at the Shepherdstown Battlefield

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Shepherdstown, WV – Preservation at the site of the brief but significant September 1862 Battle of Shepherdstown moved a step forward Monday with signature of a conservation easement permanently protecting an additional 2.5 acres along the Potomac River at the intersection of River and Trough Roads.

Confederate troops made a dramatic overnight retreat from the Battle of Antietam across Pack Horse Ford to that intersection, after which they moved up Trough Road. Union troops pursued but were forced back across the Potomac in an action that is credited with convincing the Confederate forces not to invade Maryland again in 1862 and Union forces to not attempt further pursuit of General Lee on the southern side of the Potomac.

The 2.5 acres are located on the downstream side of the intersection, adding to the 16 acres already preserved by conservation easement on the upstream side of the intersection. The land now protected includes not only the key half mile of riverbank but also the heights overlooking the ford – heights temporarily held by Union forces and then by Confederate forces, who used the location to bombard fleeing Yankees.

All 18 acres are owned by the Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission, with the conservation easement held by the Land Trust of the Eastern Panhandle. Funding for purchase of the additional 2.5 acres came from the Civil War Trust and from the Shepherdstown Battlefield Preservation Association, which has played a crucial role in finding funding for the protection of these properties. Reimbursement to the Civil War Trust by the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP) was conditioned on placement of a conservation easement on those acres.

ABPP maps show both a core area and a study area for the congressionally-recognized Battle of Shepherdstown. More recently, a National Park Service special resources study recommended that the key area of the battlefield be added to the Antietam National Battlefield, a recommendation dependent on congressional action. The 18 acres owned by the Historic Landmarks Commission would become the core portion of that addition, with other additions only as landowners agree.

The Historic Landmarks Commission hopes to acquire additional land in the battle area. Even land that it does not buy can be protected by conservation easement through the Land Trust, which already holds easements on 16 acres uphill along Trough Road, leading away from the Potomac. That land continues in private ownership but can never be developed further.

The land upstream from the intersection of River and Trough Roads was the site of a Cement Mill that supplied hydraulic cement for the construction of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and continued in operation until 1901. Still visible are the cement mill kilns below River Road, where Union soldiers took cover, and the ruins of some of the cement mill buildings.

Additional information about these programs is available from Martin Burke, Chairman of the Historic Landmarks Commission, 304-876-3883, or from Grant Smith, President, Land Trust of the Eastern Panhandle, 304-876-2583.