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The Army's battlefield parks in the US national park system: From grafted branch to poisoned fruit

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ABSTRACT

The first set of parks created by the United States government under uniform administration was a set of Civil War battlefields under the control of the War Department, or Army. The first battlefield parks were created in the 1890s and expanded into a much larger system stretching across the country. The Army developed these parks with visitor facilities and extensive memorials and monuments. In 1933 the entire system was transferred to the National Park Service and became part of the national park system. These units had been sought by the Park Service to expand the geographical and thematic diversity of its holdings. This work explores the creation of this system by the Army and what has happened to these units after their absorption into the park system. While most were expanded and became more typical park units, others were removed from the system, leaving two in their original condition.

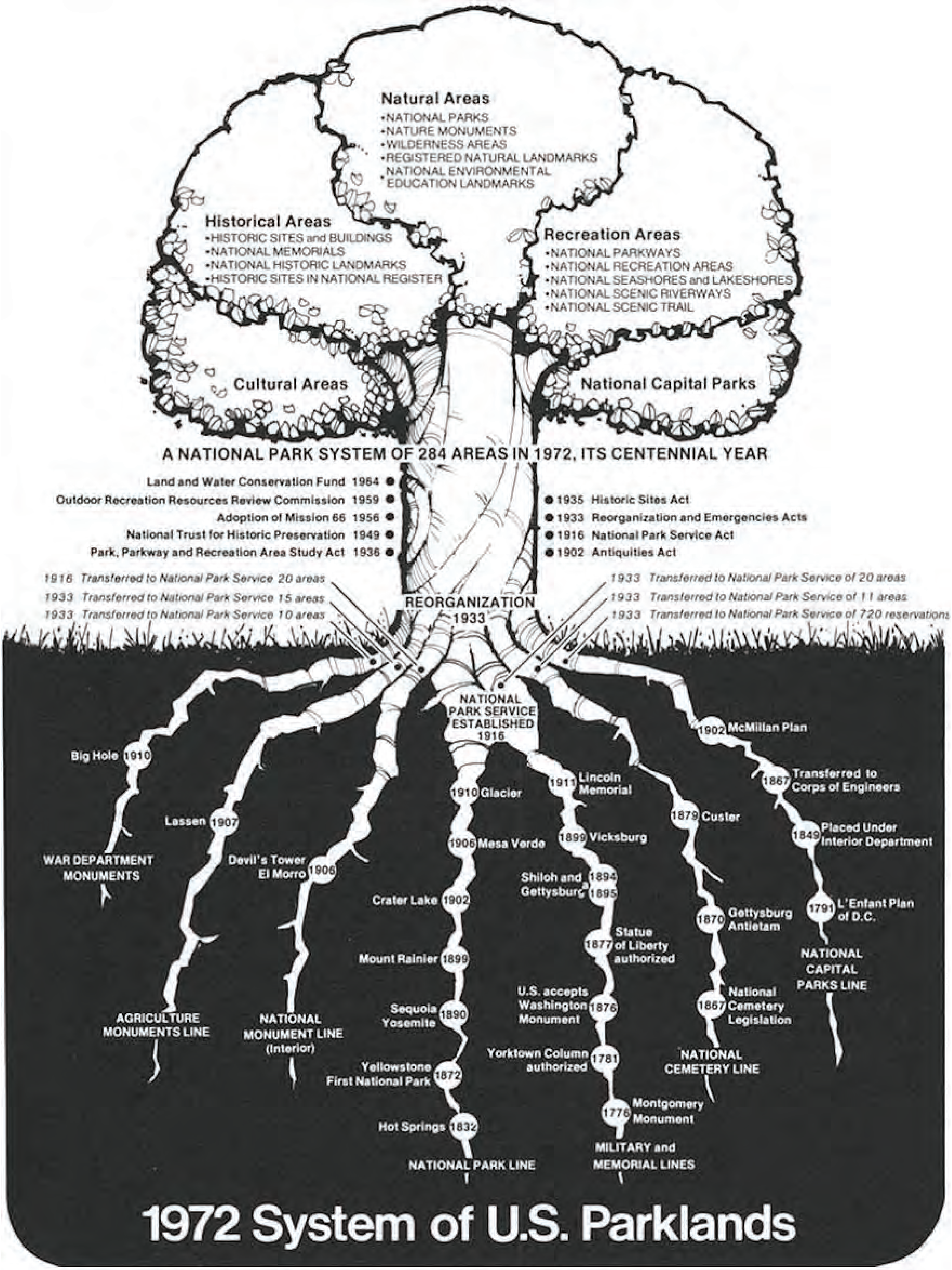
Keywords: Battlefield, national park, Army, National Park Service, United States

INTRODUCTION

The US national park system consists of a diverse set of parks, monuments, historic sites, historical parks, military parks, seashores and lakeshores, parkways, and other areas with different titles—over 20 designations in all. Beginning in the 19th century new units have been continually added, and since 1916 this growing collection, which reached 430 units in 2024, has been protected and managed by the National Park Service (NPS). The development of this system was not simply one of linear growth. In 1972, NPS historian Ronald Lee summarized its growth up to that point with a family tree diagram showing five distinct types of parks (cultural, historical, natural, recreational, and those in the National Capital Region), each with roots signifying different origins (Figure 1). These roots comprised several national monument lines (those belonging to the War Department, Department of Agriculture, and Department of the Interior), traditional national parks, a military and memorial line, national cemeteries, and a National Capital Region line. Rather than different types of parks being added in succession, the family tree shows a tangled and sometimes simultaneous origin for different components of the system.

Lee's 1972 tree graphic provides a convenient view of the growth of the system and remains useful today, but closer inspection reveals more tangled roots, among them a growing recognition of the importance of the 1864 Yosemite grant as the first great land preservation action (Diamant and Carr 2022). Also hidden in this family tree are some grafted branches that were added deliberately by NPS to broaden the extent of the park system both geographically and thematically (Weber and Sultana 2024). Given that all the first traditional national parks

FIGURE 1. The National Park Family Tree, devised by NPS historian Ronald Lee (1972).


Natural Areas
•NATIONAL PARKS
•NATURE MONUMENTS
•WILDERNESS AREAS
•REGISTERED NATURAL LANDMARKS
•NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION LANDMARKS
Historical Areas
•HISTORIC SITES and BUILDINGS
•NATIONAL MEMORIALS
•NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS
•HISTORIC SITES IN NATIONAL REGISTER
Recreation Areas
•NATIONAL PARKWAYS
•NATIONAL RECREATION AREAS
•NATIONAL SEASHORES and LAKESHORES
•NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAYS
•NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL
Cultural Areas
National Capital Parks
A NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM OF 284 AREAS IN 1972, ITS CENTENNIAL YEAR
Land and Water Conservation Fund 1964
Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission 1959
Adoption of Mission 66 1956
National Trust for Historic Preservation 1949
Park, Parkway and Recreation Area Study Act 1936
1935 Historic Sites Act
1933 Reorganization and Emergencies Acts
1916 National Park Service Act
1902 Antiquities Act
1916 Transferred to National Park Service 20 areas
1933 Transferred to National Park Service 15 areas
1933 Transferred to National Park Service 10 areas
1933 Transferred to National Park Service of 20 areas
1933 Transferred to National Park Service of 11 areas
1933 Transferred to National Park Service of 720 reservations
REORGANIZATION 1933
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE ESTABLISHED 1916
Big Hole 1910
Lassen 1907
WAR DEPARTMENT MONUMENTS
Devil's Tower El Morro 1906
AGRICULTURE MONUMENTS LINE
NATIONAL MONUMENT LINE (Interior)
1910 Glacier
1906 Mesa Verde
Crater Lake 1902
Mount Rainier 1899
Sequoia Yosemite 1890
Yellowstone First National Park 1872
Hot Springs 1832
NATIONAL PARK LINE
1911 Lincoln Memorial
1899 Vicksburg
Shiloh and Gettysburg 1894 1895
1877 Statue of Liberty authorized
U.S. accepts Washington Monument 1876
Yorktown Column authorized 1781
1776 Montgomery Monument
MILITARY and MEMORIAL LINES
1879 Custer
1870 Gettysburg Antietam
1867 National Cemetery Legislation
NATIONAL CEMETERY LINE
1902 McMillan Plan
1867 Transferred to Corps of Engineers
1849 Placed Under Interior Department
1791 L'Enfant Plan of D.C.
NATIONAL CAPITAL PARKS LINE
1972 System of U.S. Parklands

were located in the West, the Park Service developed a geographic strategy of moving east towards the more populous part of the country in a bid to increase visitation and political support, as well as expanding thematically into recreation, culture, and history, which in turn have been broadened to better represent the country's population. There has also been greater attention given to the dozens of park units removed from the system over the years (Hogenauer 1991a, 1991b; Weber 2016, 2022). While in Lee's diagram these former units might be thought of as dead or diseased branches that had to be pruned for the overall health of the tree, their story is much more varied than that. They might be better thought of as branches grafted onto the national park system tree that didn't take, or even as offshoots from the tree to be planted elsewhere.

The goal of this paper is to examine one of those grafted branches, those battlefield parks under the administration of the War Department, from their origins in the 1890s until they were transferred to NPS in 1933. This paper will examine how this branch came to be, why it was incorporated into the park family tree, and with what consequences for the park system. Though much has been written about battlefield commemoration and national monuments, there has been little investigation into the geography and purpose of the Army's park system that gave rise to NPS battlefield parks.

THE ARMY AND PARKS

While the origins of America's national park system can be traced back to the creation of Yellowstone in 1872 or Yosemite in 1864, or even earlier to the Hot Springs reservation ion 1832, the second place in the country to be set aside specifically as a "national park" was Mackinac National Park in northern Michigan (Widder 1975). This was created in 1875 on an abandoned army fort on Mackinac Island, and placed under the administration of the War Department, or the US Army. The park did not last long, as it was closed and the land transferred to the state of Michigan in 1895, but this was just the beginning of the Army's involvement with parks. In 1886 the Army began providing soldiers to protect Yellowstone, followed several years later by more at Yosemite, Sequoia, and General Grant (now Kings Canyon) National Parks (Hampton 1971). There they pursued hunters, patrolled the backcountry, and put out forest fires, while their uniforms, and especially their hats, were strong influences on later ranger uniforms.

In addition to this involvement with national parks, the Army also began developing its own park system. This stemmed from a growing interest in battlefield preservation. The nation's centennial in 1876 had raised awareness of the country's history, and while private organizations had marked some Revolutionary War sites, attention now turned to protecting Civil War battlefields (Lee 1973). A growing push for reconciliation between North and South in the post-Reconstruction era (albeit shared by few if any African Americans, as we shall see), marked especially by battlefield reunions, brought a desire to commemorate these Civil War sites before their locations were forgotten and the old battlefields became overgrown (Lee 1973; Smith 2008, 2009).

Five Civil War battlefields were selected for preservation by the War Department to ensure that each major geographic Army group would be represented: Chickamauga and Chattanooga on the Georgia–Tennessee line, Shiloh in western Tennessee, Gettysburg in Pennsylvania, Vicksburg in Mississippi, and Antietam in Maryland (Smith 2008). Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park was the first, established by Congress in 1890. It was not only regarded as the perfect battlefield but the most representative of those who participated in the Civil War. Units from almost every state fought there, along with many of the war's most notable generals. The battlefield was almost intact aside from the growth of trees (Lee 1973), and the War Department's goal was to preserve the entire battlefield, about 7,600 acres of land. Vicksburg, Gettysburg, and Shiloh were created later using the same approach (Table 1).

The first task with any battlefield park was to purchase the land (Smith 2004, 2008, 2009). Before that could be done, the War Department had to carry out a survey to identify the most important locations associated with the battle, including a review of records and interviews with participants. Land would then be purchased, if possible, but in several parks the option was left open for long-term leases. Residents within the new park might be allowed to continue living there under the requirement that they would keep up historic properties and make no changes to vegetation, buildings, or roads without permission, and that they participate in the care of monuments and markers within the parks. The goal was to preserve conditions at the time of the battle, which meant removing newer structures or vegetation and replacing others. The enabling legislation also allowed for states to put up markers or monuments marking the battle. These parks would be historical landscapes, carefully maintained to depict conditions at a particular moment in time but would also be filled with commemorative markers and structures. However, in 1896 Congress mandated that these battlefield parks were to be available for military studies and Army or National Guard maneuvers, giving them an additional purpose (Lee 1973). The Chickamauga battlefield was in fact used as an

	War memorialized	Year created	Original acreage	Current acreage
Chickamauga Plan units				
Chickamauga and Chattanooga	Civil	1890	7,600	9,036.3
Gettysburg	Civil	1895	2,451	5,987.7
Guilford Courthouse	Revolutionary	1926	125	250.3
Kings Mountain	Revolutionary	1931	4,012	3,945.3
Moores Creek	Revolutionary	1926	30	87.8
Shiloh	Civil	1894	3,546	5,977.9
Vicksburg	Civil	1899	1,802.2	1,802.2
		Average acreage	**2,726.7**	**3,869.6**
Antietam Plan units				
Antietam Battlefield	Civil	1890	50	3,230.4
Appomattox	Civil	1930	1	1,774.1
Brices Cross Roads	Civil	1929	1	1
Chalmette Monument and Grounds	1812	1904	1	22,420.9
Cowpens	Revolutionary	1929	1	841.6
Fort Donelson	Civil	1928	Unknown	1,024.8
Fort Necessity	French & Indian	1931	2	902.8
Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania	Civil	1927	Unknown	8,382.2
Kennesaw Mountain	Civil	1917	Unknown	2,852.6
Petersburg	Civil	1926	2,046.9	2,739.7
Stones River	Civil	1927	Unknown	709.5
Tupelo	Civil	1929	1	1
White Plains	Revolutionary	1933	Unknown	Delisted 1956
		Average acreage	**233.8**	**3,740**

TABLE 1. Chickamauga Plan and Antietam Plan units of the War Department system.

Army base during the Spanish-American War and again in World War I, in both cases requiring new buildings, roads, and infrastructure that were later removed (Smith 2009).

Antietam was made a national battlefield site in 1890 but was created as a very different kind of park than the four discussed above (Lee 1973; Snell and Brown 1986; Smith 2008). Rather than preserving the entire battlefield, only small parcels of land were acquired throughout the former battlefield, preserving key locations . This was not intentional but rather incidental to the failure of Congress to pass a bill to purchase the entire battlefield. Antietam National Battlefield Site instead was created through a small provision inserted as an amendment into a large spending bill (Smith 2008). This approach became known as the “Antietam Plan,”, contrasted with the “Chickamauga Plan” of large parks that preserved entire battlefields. Both plans were followed at several later parks (Table 1), and the term “Antietam Plan” was specified in the text of legislation of several parks created during that time.

Growth of the System

The creation of these parks did not end the process of Civil War commemoration, but only raised expectations for more battlefield parks, memorials, and monuments (Lee 1973). Between 1901 and 1904, 34 bills were introduced for more battlefield parks, which promised to require sums of money Congress was not willing to allocate. Those calling for more parks were also interested in commemorating the American Revolution, the French and Indian War, the War of 1812, and other wars. After the end of the First World War interest in preserving battlefields reached new heights. One new park was Moores Creek National Military Park, added in 1926 on 30 acres in North Carolina following local efforts (Capps and Davis 1999). Soon after this the War Department initiated a study that recommended a system of battlefields be identified, which recognized that there were different groups of battlefield sites, some large, organized along the Chickamauga Plan (as with Gettysburg), others organized along the Antietam Plan, and yet other, smaller sites only commemorated by markers or monuments.

This distinction was formalized into three groups of military parks (Lee 1973; Dilsaver 1994). Class I were large battlefields, represented in their entirety at places such as Shiloh and Gettysburg. Class IIA were smaller ones represented by multiple markers. Class IIB were small sites, commemorated by a single tablet or marker. It was not expected that Class IIB sites would become permanent units under federal care, because "on fields where single monuments have been erected it has been the policy of the Government, as soon as they have been completed, to transfer them to some local association for care and maintenance" (Dilsaver 1994: 72). While there were six Class I (Saratoga and Yorktown from the Revolution and the remainder from the Civil War) and 16 IIA sites (all but the Battle of New Orleans being from the Civil War), no complete list of IIB sites was ever made given the enormous number of Civil War sites possible. The Army listed 64 IIB battles or engagements from 1775 to 1890, including 30 from the Revolution, two from the Mexican–American War, six from conflict with Native Americans in the Northwest Territory, and the remaining 25 from actions against Native Americans in western territories after the Civil War (Lee 1973). This set of places did not include every battlefield the Army was preserving, nor did the Army memorialize every battle thought worthy. A bill that would designate 50 IIB sites died without passage in 1930. Instead, small IIB memorials were authorized for Tupelo and Brices Cross Roads, both located in Mississippi, and several other sites. Moores Creek was listed on the report as a IIB site but had already been designated a national military park (Capps and Davis 1999).

Battlefields continued to be memorialized, whether they were listed or not. Camp Blount Tablets National Memorial was authorized in 1930 in Fayetteville, Tennessee, though it had not appeared on any list. After an unsuccessful attempt to redesignate it a national military park (Kanon 2001) a successful bill stated that "the Secretary of War is hereby authorized to erect at Camp Blount, Lincoln County, Tennessee, tablets or markers describing and commemorating the historical events which have taken place there" (National Park Service Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs 2004: 589) referring to the camp's role in the 1813 Creek Wars (Foster, Sebastian, and Gray 1931). The secretary of war was also authorized to accept the donation of the Old Stone Bridge over the nearby Elk River. This was built in 1861 and notable only because General William T. Sherman refused to destroy the bridge as ordered in 1863.

Not all park units under Army administration fit so easily into such a framework, as the War Department also had two sites designated as national parks: Abraham Lincoln (1916) and Fort McHenry (1925). The Abraham Lincoln site was a donation to the US Government and included his Kentucky birthplace; it presumably was given to the secretary of war for administration due to Lincoln's role in the Civil War, which of course the Army was already commemorating. Fort McHenry was a military base that was almost given to the city of Baltimore before Congress decided to retain it as a park and memorial. The War Department also accumulated a set of ten of the national monuments proclaimed by the president using the authority of the Antiquities Act of 1906. In sum, by 1933 the Army had an impressive park system concentrated in the Southeast but also with locations in California, Montana, and New York City (Figure 2). Further efforts towards Army-administered national parks and battlefield commemoration were ended when the War Department's battlefields were transferred to NPS on June 10, 1933.

Transition to the National Park Service

In 1916 the National Park Service was created and took over the management of western national parks and monuments administered by the Department of the Interior (Ise 1961; Foresta 1984). NPS replaced the Army in Yellowstone, Yosemite, General Grant, and Sequoia and began developing its own rangers to patrol these and other parks. The new agency added more parks over the years, though these tended to be larger than battlefields and based on scenery rather than history. These units were, however, located largely in the sparsely settled West, remote from the country's centers of population and political power. To compensate for this and build public support the Park Service adopted a geographic strategy of moving the new national park system eastwards, which bore fruit when new parks such as Great Smoky Mountains, Shenandoah, and Mammoth Cave were created in the 1930s (Foresta 1984). NPS was not alone among federal agencies in this strategy; decades earlier the newly created US Geological Survey took on many eastern mapping projects to garner political support for its preferred activities in the West (Manning 1967). Taking over the Army's park system would further the NPS agenda by instantly adding a large number of parks in the east, many near large cities.

While the War Department's parks had once been important to the department, by the 1920s the Army was losing interest in them. The idea of transferring the War Department's parks to the Park Service came up as early as 1924 (Ise 1961; Smith 2008, 2009), though there was concern that NPS did not understand the meaning of these parks and would not manage them appropriately, turning them into playgrounds (Snell and Brown 1986; Smith 2008). But over time this transfer made sense; Civil War battlefields had less meaning as educational facilities

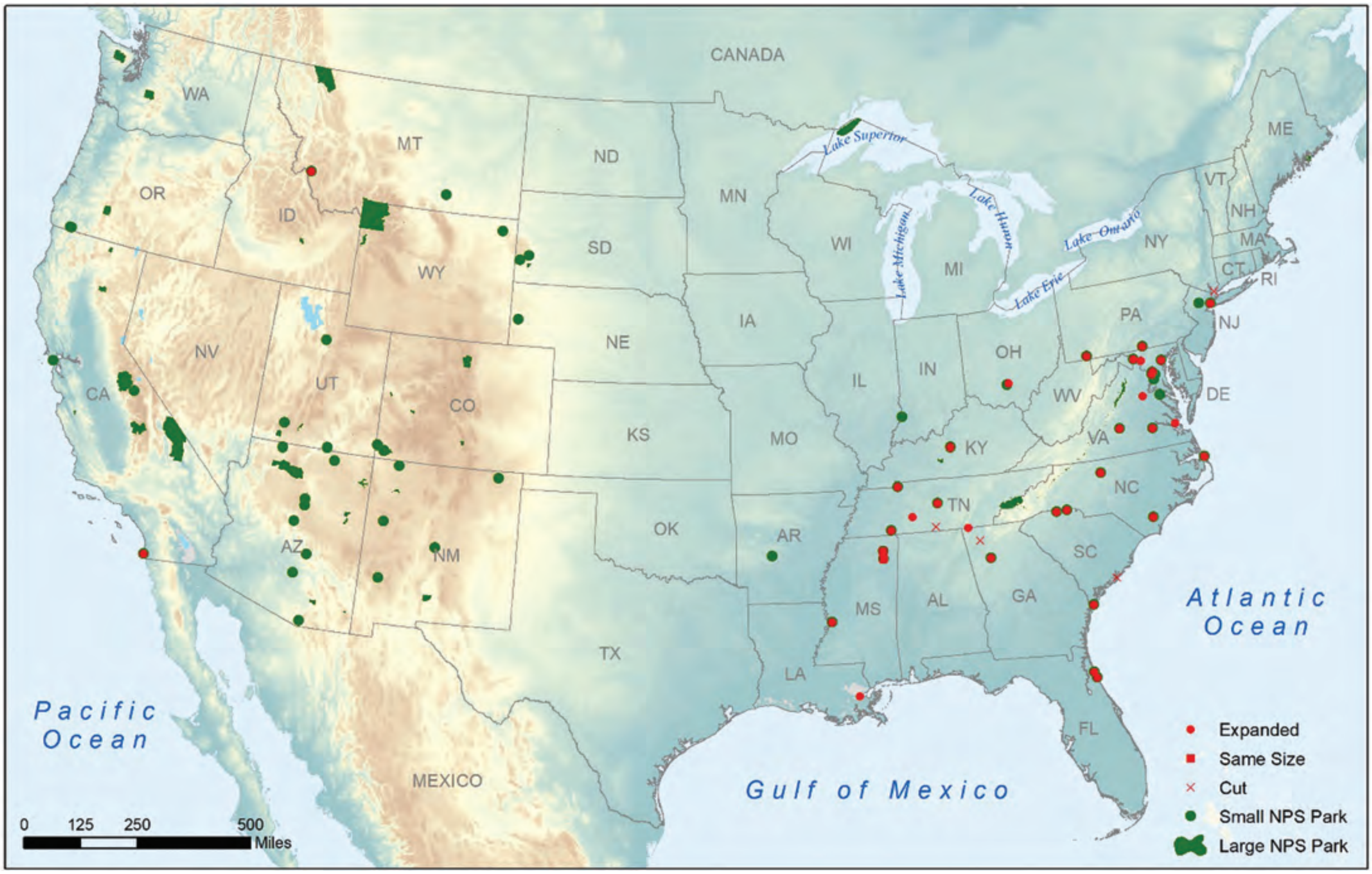


FIGURE 2. The extent and relative size of the park systems of the War Department (red) and National Park Service (green) as they existed at the time of the merger in 1933. War Department sites that were subsequently dropped from the national park system are denoted with an "x."

for new officers, the veterans who were instrumental in pushing for battlefield preservation began to die off, and the War Department found itself uninterested in becoming the nation's historic preservation agency. Bills were introduced in Congress to transfer the Army park system, but none succeeded (nor did efforts to have national forests transferred to NPS). It finally took an executive order by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933 to accomplish the transfer of eleven national military parks, two national parks, ten battlefield sites, ten national monuments, eleven national cemeteries, and four memorials from the War Department to the National Park Service (Table 2) (Dilsaver 1994). The Army was out of the park business.

THE FATE OF THE ARMY PARKS

What happened to the former Army parks after they joined the national park system in 1933? Much depended on the size of the park. Larger battlefields, such as Chickamauga and Chattanooga, were relatively easily assimilated into the national park system (Table 2). These had been developed by the Army with museums, park roads and drives, and a cultural landscape complete with plaques and memorials to the events that took place there. At Shiloh the markers and monuments were erected between 1900 and 1908, and the current auto tour in 1927 (Smith 2004). With their memorialized landscape these parks looked quite different from scenic parks within the national park system, and still do (Figure 3), but were consistent with the national park ideal of a large area that has been set aside for preservation.

But many War Department units were quite small and often fragmented; the Antietam Plan (or Class IIA) made sense for marking battlefields that covered a large area but did not necessarily convert easily into a national park unit, as it did not allow for NPS control over a large land area within which visitor facilities could be provided. A solution was to expand the unit to allow for roads, visitor centers, and other facilities, and give NPS control of the landscape. At Antietam this expansion was carried out in part by private donations to prevent unprotected battlefield land being developed for shopping centers. Many of the smaller battlefields were likewise greatly expanded into larger battlefield parks (Table 1).

Small Class IIB sites were quite different from parks and monuments in the national park system due to their small size and lack of features. They were centered on markers and often commemorated relatively minor

TABLE 2. War Department parks transferred to the National Park Service in 1933 and their status today.

	War memorialized	War Department Class	Subsequent status
National Military Parks			
Chickamauga and Chattanooga	Civil	I	Same
Fort Donelson	Civil		Fort Donelson NB
Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania	Civil		Same
Gettysburg	Civil	I	Same
Guilford Courthouse	Revolutionary		Same
Kings Mountain	Revolutionary		Same
Moores Creek	Revolutionary		Moores Creek NB
Petersburg	Civil		Petersburg NB
Shiloh	Civil		Same
Stones River	Civil		Stones River NB
Vicksburg	Civil	I	Same
Battlefield Sites			
Antietam Battlefield	Civil		Antietam NB
Appomattox	Civil		Appomattox Court House NHP
Brices Cross Roads	Civil		Brices Cross Roads NB
Chalmette Monument and Grounds	1812		Jean Lafitte NHP and Preserve
Cowpens	Revolutionary	IIB	Cowpens NB
Fort Necessity	French & Indian		Fort Necessity NB
Kennesaw Mountain	Civil		Kennesaw Mountain NBP
Monocacy	Civil		Monocacy NB
Tupelo	Civil		Tupelo NB
White Plains	Revolutionary	IIB	Delisted 1956
National Monuments			
Big Hole Battlefield	Indian Wars in the West	IIB	Big Hole NB
Cabrillo Monument	n/a		Cabrillo NM
Castle Pinckney	Civil		Delisted 1956
Father Millet Cross	n/a		Delisted 1949; part of Fort Niagara SP
Fort Marion	Indian		Castillo de San Marcos NM
Fort Matanzas	Spanish / British conflict		Same
Fort Pulaski	Civil		Same
Meriwether Lewis	n/a		Natchez Trace Parkway
Mound City Group	n/a		Hopewell Culture NHP
Statue of Liberty	n/a		Same
Miscellaneous Memorials			
Camp Blount Tablets	1812		Delisted 1944
Kill Devil Hill Monument	n/a		Wright Brothers NMem
New Echota Marker	n/a		Delisted 1950
Lee Mansion	Civil		Arlington House,
the Robert E. Lee Memorial			
Battleground, District of Columbia	Civil		NPS DC parks
Yorktown	Revolutionary	I	Colonial NHP

TABLE 2 (cont'd). War Department parks transferred to the National Park Service in 1933 and their status today.

	War memorialized	War Department Class	Subsequent status
National Parks			
Abraham Lincoln National Park	n/a		Abraham Lincoln Birthplace NHP
Fort McHenry National Park	1812		Fort McHenry NM and Historic Shrine
NB = National Battlefield; NBP = National Battlefield Park; NHP = National Historical Park; NM = National Monument; SP = State Park; NMem = National Memorial			

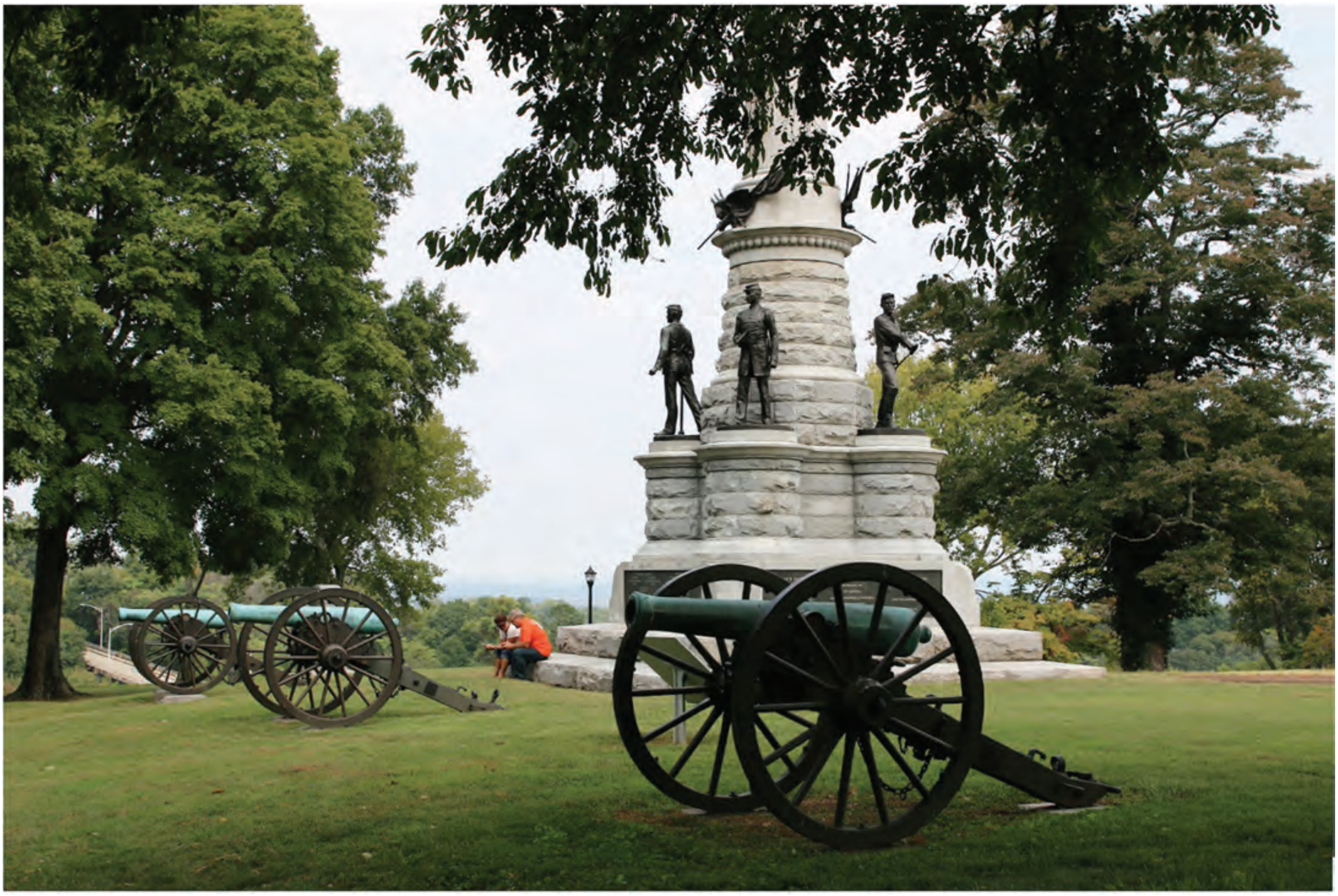


FIGURE 3. Memorials on Missionary Ridge, Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

events. What was the NPS to do with these? They had no scenery, no large battlefield to tour, no historic homes, no museums—none of the trappings of parks at the time. Three solutions were evident: increase them in size to become conventional park units, eliminate them, or do nothing and leave them as they were.

Cabrillo National Monument is an example of the first strategy. This was created in 1913 around a statue of Juan Cabrillo, the first European explorer to reach the US Pacific Coast, in Fort Rosecrans on a promontory overlooking the entrance to San Diego Bay (Lehmann 1987). The boundaries were originally 0.5 acres, but were later increased to include a lighthouse, coastal tidepools, and World War II fortifications. Today it provides a scenic overlook on San Diego, and few visitors pay much attention to Cabrillo's statue. Big Hole National Monument in Montana was created as a five-acre battlefield monument in 1910 (Catton and Hubber 1999). Assigned to the War Department, it was managed by the US Forest Service, which sought to enlarge the site to allow for recreation facilities. Under NPS management it was on a list of units considered substandard in 1954 and worthy of removal, but it survived and was expanded during the Mission 66 program to over 655 acres to allow room for a visitor center and recreation facilities. Big Hole was redesignated as Big Hole National Battlefield in 1963, and then legislatively became a unit of Nez

Perce National Historical Park in 1992 while remaining a separate entity for public-facing purposes. Nez Perce contains 38 different units in four states, averaging 120 acres each—perhaps the ultimate expression of the Antietam Plan.

The second approach was evident when many small memorial sites were cut from the park system and turned over to local control, as was the original intent for Class IIB-type sites. New Echota Marker is now a Georgia state park of 200 acres with several reconstructed buildings. Father Millet Cross National Monument was removed from the system, but the cross remains as part of Fort Niagara State Park in New York. At Camp Blount Tablets National Memorial, the stone arch bridge was bypassed by the state in 1924 and collapsed in 1969. In 2000 a replica bridge was built in a nearby city park. Roadside markers were put up along US Highway 431 to commemorate Camp Blount in 1913, again in 1952, and most recently in 1998 (Kanon 2001). Much of the former camp was developed as a shopping center in the 1970s and much of it is now occupied by a Walmart (Figure 4). A recent effort has led to the creation of a state historical park on the site. As Kanon (2001) noted, this place has experienced many events over time, among them "the efforts of women's groups to mark the landscape with monuments, the impact of progressive era highway construction, federal efforts at creating historical parks, the search for tourism dollars, prisoners of war and southern cotton fields during World War II, the suburbanization of the rural south, the debates between heritage and history, and the lure of public history" (2001: 85).

Only two small sites, Tupelo National Battlefield and Brices Crossroads National Battlefield Site in Mississippi, were left much as they were in War Department days (Figure 5). They still have the one-acre boundaries they possessed when transferred to NPS in 1933, and neither has any facilities other than a parking lot, cannons, and several signs. They are both administered by staff of Natchez Trace Parkway, which runs near them. These two units are relics from the Army's system and are like no others in today's national park system.

The two park systems compared

Contrary to the War Department's fears, the battlefield parks did not become playgrounds. The landscape of markers and monuments remained intact, and NPS has managed these sites so that their commemorative landscapes remain intact. Though some battlefields, such as Kennesaw Mountain in the Atlanta suburbs or Guilford Courthouse in Greensboro, North Carolina, are now encircled by suburban development and function largely as city parks, in order to preserve the solemnity and dignity of its battlefield sites the Park Service does not allow many recreational activities common in other parks: no picnics, sunbathing, or tossing Frisbees, among others. This has created endless conflict between the agency and

FIGURE 4. Map of former Camp Blount Tablets National Memorial, 2023.

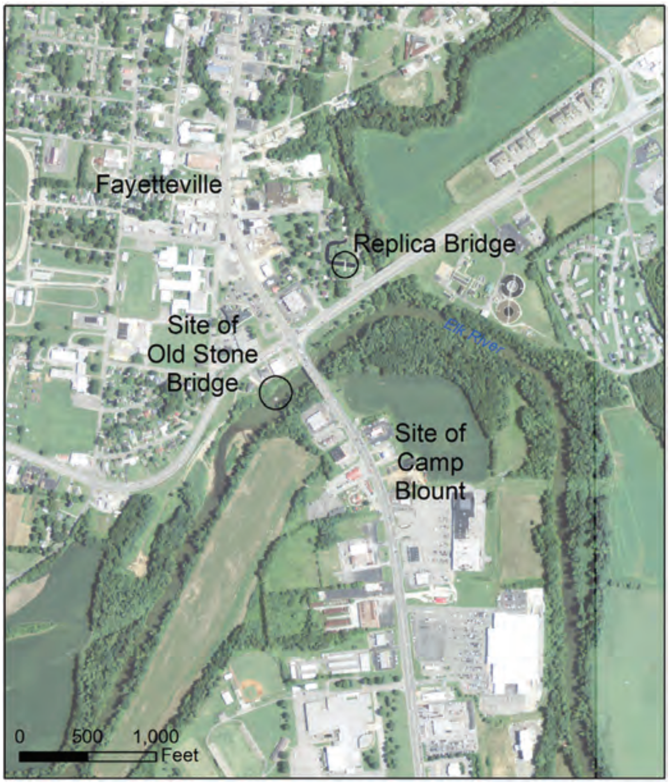
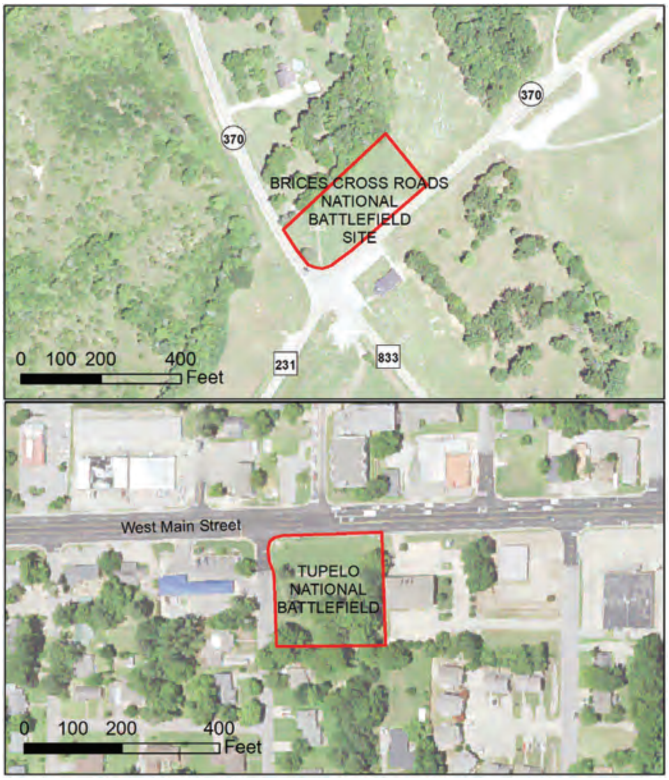


FIGURE 5. Map of Brices Crossroads and Tupelo National Battlefields, 2023.


370
370
BRICES CROSS ROADS NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD SITE
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231
833
West Main Street
TUPELO NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD
0 100 200 400 Feet

locals over the years and shows that the purpose of these battlefield parks remains intact (Baker 1995).

But the War Department parks were developed and operated quite differently from the later NPS parks. The differences began with the need to acquire privately owned land, something NPS did not attempt (other than by donation) until the 1930s when several large national parks were authorized in eastern states, though with restrictions on the Park Service that made the task difficult (Weber and Sultana 2024). Not until the 1960s would the NPS have a relatively free hand to buy privately owned land. The fact that residents were allowed to continue living within some Army parks is one of the greatest differences between the two approaches. The Park Service was firmly dedicated to what has since been pejoratively termed "fortress conservation," in which all residents are forced out, land uses restricted, and resources within protected from outsiders. But the Army's approach of creating parks as cultural landscapes that included residents has gained ground in NPS. National heritage areas have been created since 1984 to help preserve the history and culture of areas; they depend on residents remaining in place. These are not national park units, but the Park Service aids local groups and agencies seeking to preserve them.

While the preservation of battlefields in the 1890s can be considered a success story, it also conceals a troublesome history of racism. As noted earlier, when the first battlefields were protected in the 1890s it was at a time of national reconciliation—which, not coincidentally, also marked the end of Reconstruction and the rise of the Lost Cause myth and the Jim Crow era (Smith 2008, 2009). The veterans who created these battlefield parks had no interest in discussing the meaning of the Civil War or why it was fought, making the battlefields unintended monuments to the rise of Jim Crow segregation and the Lost Cause myth. The presence of African Americans in and around the town of Gettysburg during the battle was erased, along with almost all gains they had won during the Civil War (Creighton 2005). As late as the 1950s only three of fourteen restaurants and none of the fourteen lodging establishments in the town of Gettysburg accepted African American customers; this town, because of its embrace of a heroic Confederacy, may ironically have been more hostile towards African American visitors than other small towns of that era and region (Creighton 2005).

In other parks in the South and around Washington, DC, NPS did little different until quite recently. It was not just at Civil War battlefield parks: at Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks, and at the later Prince William Forest Park in Maryland, segregated facilities were either constructed or planned (Young 2009). NPS's effort to increase the geographic scope of the national park system in the 1930s came at a cost of excluding much of the country's population from that system. The Park Service is today grappling with that legacy, seeking to increase visitation by non-whites and facing the possibility of having to remove statutes or memorials to the Confederacy from battlefields and other Civil War-era sites (Creighton 2023; Quigley 2023). To return to Lee's (1972) tree metaphor, while grafting on the battlefield root added a flourishing new branch to the park family tree, it has turned out to be one that also produces poisonous fruit.

CONCLUSIONS

The story of the Army's park system reveals the diverse origins of the national park system of today, and provides cautionary tales of how individual units may be cut from that system if they no longer serve a useful purpose. There are parallels with western monuments that were cut from the system, in those cases due to a lack of perceived development possibilities because of their location but also their small size (Weber 2022). Small parks can be expanded and developed, but once removed from the system they represent lost opportunities to protect a resource that may have little or no other representation in the system. While NPS guidelines do not specify any maximum or minimum acreage and instead focus on what is necessary to protect a resource, it is evident in the stories of those units that were cut that their small size appears to have been an issue. The question of park size occurred first when the Army was setting up its military park system, with the contrasting Chickamauga and Antietam Plans that differed in size and cost to create, later codified into three distinct groups. It emerged again after these battlefields were incorporated into the national park system, when those that included enough land for a tour road and scenic views were easy to incorporate, but small roadside parks or markers had no place. NPS applied a filter to these units—those above a certain size, or that were readily expandable, were kept, but others filtered out.

The debate over large versus small park units was not resolved by NPS and remains important today. The recent battles over reduction and restoration of Bears Ears National Monument and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument are distant echoes of the decisions the Army made when choosing different battlefield preservation strategies at Antietam and Gettysburg in the 1890s. While NPS wrestled with the problem of making parks big enough to be viable, today large parks may attract political attention that may threaten their survival. There is clearly a need for more studies of boundaries and how they shape a park's destiny.

While individual parks have been threatened or even eliminated (Hogenauer 1991a, 1991b; Weber 2016, 2018), it is far more interesting that an entire system was lost by an agency that no longer had any interest in it. This is not just a story of changing priorities in the 1920s but remains relevant today as another park system has appeared since the 1990s in the form of the National Conservation Lands, a group of 873 scenic areas managed in western states by the Bureau of Land Management. The most stunning of these are designated as national monuments, such as Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante in Utah, or national conservation areas. Some have been developed for tourism in much the same fashion as national park units, but most have not, and there is little likelihood that they will be. At the present time the national conservation lands and national park system co-exist, but the Reorganization of 1933 provides a precedent in which NPS could take over competing park systems. Whether America will continue to have multiple park systems administered by different agencies in the future remains to be decided.

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