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## **Wilderness Named One of Nation's Most Endangered Battlefields**

### **CWPT Issues Annual "*History Under Siege*" Report**

The Civil War Preservation Trust (CWPT) today named the Wilderness Battlefield as one of the most endangered Civil War sites in the nation. At a press conference today in Washington, DC, CWPT unveiled its annual "History Under Siege: A Guide to America's most Endangered Civil War Battlefields." The report identifies the most threatened Civil War sites and what can be done to rescue them.

According to the report, "The Wilderness was included due to the proposed 138,000-square foot Wal-Mart supercenter to be built less than a quarter mile from the battlefield. If constructed, the store would be the fifth Wal-Mart within a 20-mile radius and would ensure further commercial development on adjacent properties near the battlefield."

Among the attendees at the press conference were Zann Miner, president of Friends of Wilderness Battlefield (FoWB) and Craig Rains, a member of the FoWB Board of Directors and chairman of its Battlefield Resources Committee. FoWB is a non-profit organization that works with the National Park Service to preserve and maintain the Wilderness Battlefield.

"Since its founding, the Friends of Wilderness Battlefield has been dedicated to preservation, education and restoration of the battlefield," Miner said. "Our all-voluntary group works tirelessly with the National Park Service to ensure that the history of this battlefield and its invaluable and irreplaceable resources will be here for many future generations. The battlefield's inclusion in the CWPT report is an important acknowledgement of the intense pressure facing the area."

Rains noted that FoWB supports the position of the National Park Service that the Walmart should reconsider its plan to locate near the intersection of Routes 3 and 20. FoWB is part of a coalition of preservation organizations that have been engaged in urging

Walmart to relocate to a site that is further removed from this gateway to the battlefield and to join the coalition in its proposed land-use planning process for the area. “We applaud the CWPT’s recognition of the Wilderness as an endangered and critical site in our nation’s Civil War history,” he said. “This action will help raise awareness of the risks to the community and the battlefield.”

“In town after town, irreplaceable battlefields that help to define our communities are being lost to development,” said CWPT president James Lighthizer at the report’s unveiling. “As we approach the Sesquicentennial of the bloodiest conflict in our nation’s history, we need to be more aware than ever of the importance of preserving these sacred places for generations to come.”

Joining Lighthizer at the news conference was Academy Award-winning actor Richard Dreyfuss, an avid student of history. Reflecting on the importance of historic preservation, Dreyfuss said, “These hallowed battlegrounds should be national shrines, monuments to American valor, determination and courage. Once these irreplaceable treasures are gone, they’re gone forever.”

Friends of Wilderness Battlefield is a non-profit, all volunteer organization devoted to assisting the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park in efforts to preserve the Wilderness Battlefield in Orange and Spotsylvania Counties. With more than 230 members, the Friends provide advocacy, educational programs and service projects for the battlefield.

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#### **SIDEBAR:**

In addition to the Wilderness, other sites profiled in *History Under Siege* include:

**Cedar Creek, Virginia, Oct. 19, 1864:** Preservationists continue fighting to overturn a recent zoning decision that opens 394 acres of critically important battlefield land in the Shenandoah Valley to an expanding limestone quarry.

**Fort Gaines, Alabama, August 5-8, 1864:** Dredging practices in the Gulf of Mexico have greatly sped the erosion of the Dauphin Island, which could someday be cut in half by the water. Only timely action can ensure the survival of the site.

**Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1–3, 1863:** Significant portions the battlefield lay outside the boundaries of the National Park, leaving them open for development. Preservationists are eager to protect one such area, but the high asking price has thus far put it out of their reach.

**Monocacy, Maryland, July 9, 1864:** A trash incinerator proposed along the Monocacy River would be just a few hundred yards outside Monocacy National Battlefield. The plant's 350-foot smokestack would dominate the skyline and be visible from much of the battlefield.

**New Market Heights, Virginia, September 29, 1864:** Although one of the war's most significant engagements featuring African-American troops, New Market Heights has not yet seen any land purchased by preservation organizations. Portions of the battlefield have already been destroyed by a housing development and more development is encroaching.

**Port Gibson, Mississippi, May 1, 1863:** En route to his eventual capture of Vicksburg, Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant famously called Port Gibson a town too beautiful to burn. A controversial proposal to widen Church Street through the heart of town would threaten historic neighborhoods.

**Sabine Pass, Texas, September 8, 1863:** During the war a handful of Confederate gunners at Sabine Pass turned back an entire Union fleet, but damage sustained by Hurricane Rita has kept the site closed to the public since 2005.

**South Mountain, Maryland, September 14, 1862:** Hopelessly outnumbered Confederates fought valiantly in three mountain passes, as Gen. Robert E. Lee launched his invasion of the North. Dominion Power proposes a natural gas compression station near Fox's Gap.

**Spring Hill, Tennessee, Nov. 29, 1864:** General Motors is seeking to sell approximately 500 acres of unused land surrounding the battlefield. While some will form a buffer around Rippavilla Plantation, plans call for high-density development — apartments, a hotel, a theater, restaurants and retail and office space — on approximately 400 acres.