

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS
Testimony in the July 19, 2007, Hearing on H.R. 1674 by George D. Fields

Mr. Chairman & committee members, I am grateful for the privilege of testifying on behalf of the Battle of Camden Advisory Council consisting of 25 state, federal, and local governmental agencies, non-profit corporations, and businesses that are working together to preserve this outstanding battlefield and open its meaningful resources to the public. I am George Fields, Director of the Military Heritage Program of the Palmetto Conservation Foundation that serves as the administrative and fiduciary agent for the project.

The Advisory Council and I eagerly support H.R. 1674 introduced by Congressman John Spratt and co-sponsored by 7 other Congressmen and request the committee to recommend this bill for approval by the full House of Representatives.

The Advisory Council began its work in 2000 when several leaders determined that the Battle of Camden National Historic Landmark area of 1380 acres was America's most important unprotected battlefield and began a program to preserve it for the future. The National Park Service (NPS) has been a strong and cooperative partner in this effort along with state and local partners in researching, planning, and preserving a sizable portion of the battlefield. Two American Battlefield Protection Program grants and a Save America's Treasures grant have been provided.

This bill clearly implements the recommendations made by several groups over the last few years. A Strategic Plan for the battlefield developed in 2003 with the assistance of an NPS American Battlefield Protection Program grant established a clear goal for the battlefield to become a National Battlefield and set up a program to preserve and prepare the site for this future status. A later reconnaissance study, "A Reevaluation of Historic Camden and Camden Battlefield," done by committee sent by the National Park Service confirmed the strategic goal and recommended the following actions: "Public Law 105-391 sets forth the following criteria against which resources must be evaluated in order to determine their eligibility as subjects for a Special Resources Study....Our investigations, as detailed below, suggest that both Historic Camden and Camden Battlefield, to varying degrees, meet these criteria. Based on these findings, it is recommended that the NPS conduct a new Special Resources Study for both Historic Camden and the Camden Battlefield." (p.3) H.R. 1674 describes how the battlefield meets these NPS criteria, and I shall briefly highlight them in my testimony today.

A. NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Camden Battlefield is one of the most nationally significant historic sites of the American Revolution. The site's national significance is clearly documented in the National Historic Landmark designation and listing on the National Register of Historic Places. All comprehensive history books of the American Revolution describe the battle as a significant and key battle in the southern campaign. Troops from 8 of the original 13 states fought there. Numerous visitors from across the country visit the site, even without an interpretation or tourism program to attract them. When asked what caused you to leave the interstate highway and travel 8 miles out from the City of Camden, the most frequent answer is "I read about it in a history book." This battlefield belongs to the nation.

The Battle of Camden will be a most suitable fit in the National Park system. Fought on August 16, 1780, the battle was one of the largest field battles of the Revolution and a watershed battle in the Southern campaign. Later events proved it to be the high water mark of British power in America. Although the American army was soundly defeated on the Camden battlefield, the British victors were stacking arms in defeat 14 months later at Yorktown.

The Camden Battlefield is seriously threatened, and it is most feasible and cost effective to preserve the site for a military park before the land is lost to commercial development. The terrain of the site is basically the same as when the battle was fought, because the land was used for farming and timber products through the years. When the site became threatened by commercial development in 2001, the coalition began protecting the site by land purchases and conservation easements. Because funds were limited and not all 19 landowners with property in the NHL area were willing to sell, priority was placed on preserving the core of the battlefield first and preserving the maneuver area later.

I am delighted to announce that earlier this week a contract was negotiated to purchase an additional 168.2 acres in the core of the battlefield for \$566,052. This tract added to the 310 acres listed in the bill brings the total now owned to 479.20 acres, and also negotiation are underway for conservation easements on an addition 100 acres. Having this property increases the feasibility for a Camden National Battlefield.

There is still an urgency to acquire the remainder of the NHL area because of market pressures. The property in the area of the battlefield is rapidly changing from forestry land to residential and commercial uses. Two-thirds of

the 1,380 acres needed to preserve the entire landmark and provide for park facilities has changed owners three times within the last four years. Land values have risen over 40% during this period, and this trend will continue. It is feasible for the battlefield to become a National Park, and this be done before the property cost become prohibitive. The NPS National Historic Landmark report to congress for several years placed this landmark on the ‘watch list,” and in 2005 the Advisory Council recommended the status be changed to “endangered” because new market forces were rapidly changing land use in the area around the NHL.

B. Themes, Sites and Resources not already in the NPS system.

The Battle of Camden has new and distinctive themes and resources that are not already represented in the National Park system. In the Southern Campaign this battle remains the key to understanding how British power although still militarily strong enough to win this decisive battle began to wane until their defeat at Yorktown and how American patriot strength like the mythical phoenix arose from the ashes of this decisive defeat and created a force and strategy to defeat the strongest military force in the world.

This battlefield has the potential to be the center of an interpretation program that describes how military, political, and social forces in the area caused American Independence to emerge out of a sting of defeats. Two other nationally recognized sites, Hobkirk Hill Battlefield and Historic Camden Park, the British post that politically and militarily controlled the region, are located within eight miles, and within 30 miles, 20 other sites of smaller battles and skirmishes are located.

The Battle of Camden illustrates that military power is successful only when re-enforced by political and social forces. Historic Camden was Britain’s governmental and military center for the backcountry of the Carolinas, and the battle was fought for control of the area around the fortified post. Before the Battle of Camden, the British system of integrating political control, logistics, and military power enabled their army to win control of first Georgia and then most of South Carolina. The British army operated efficiently and Lord Cornwallis’ leadership was brilliant on the Camden battlefield. Military power alone was not enough to win back the emerging United States. Camden taught the Americans how to use their scarce resources, and the power of the people arose to turn the tide toward victory in the southern campaign and thereby win American Independence.

C. Public Petition

The support of the public is clearly seen in the recent progress made with contribution of resources.

- Coalition of 25 federal, state, and private agencies to develop and then implement a strategic plan with a goal for a Camden National Battlefield.
- Almost \$2 million contributed since 2000 for the project.
- Acquiring already 479.2 acres in preparation for a Battlefield Park.
- Citizens expressed strong support for a National Park at several public hearings and to the team conducting the 2003 Reconnaissance study for the National Park Service.

As you see by this progress, we are not asking the federal government to come and do a job for us, but we are asking for the level of federal partnership be raised another notch to the level that the national significance and public involvement indicate the Battle of Camden should have.