

Center for State of the Parks



PEA RIDGE NATIONAL MILITARY PARK

SNAPSHOT

On March 7 and 8, 1862, Union and Confederate troops fought in northern Arkansas at the Battle of Pea Ridge. The Union's victory garnered it control of the state of Missouri.

Pea Ridge National Military Park was established in 1956, after decades of effort by the citizens of Arkansas. About 95 percent of the Civil War battlefield where fighting took place is protected within the park. Protecting such a large portion of an original battlefield is uncommon among Civil War parks in the National Park System. The park also protects other cultural resources, such as the Elkhorn Tavern, used by both Confederate and Union forces during the battle; a segment of the Cherokee Trail of Tears; thousands of Civil War artifacts; historic fields and roads; and earthworks built by Union forces.

In addition to its cultural resources, Pea Ridge National Military Park protects ecosystems that support a variety of animal and plant species, including several rare plants.

In 2008, more than 68,000 people visited Pea Ridge National Military Park to learn about the park's history and pursue recreational activities. Walking trails provide views of the historic battlefield and access to the park's upland and forest habitat,



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Natural and cultural resources are intertwined at Pea Ridge National Military Park. Pictured here is a Union artillery line as it was placed on the morning of March 8, 1862 on the Cox Farm.

while the tour road traces important battle sites. Some portions of the park are also accessible to visitors on horseback.

CHALLENGES

- Development of land adjacent to the park represents the largest threat to the park's natural resources. All borders of the park are under threat from urban expansion. Park managers have major concerns about the surrounding urban expansion and the two large-scale highway projects being considered in the area, as they would increase vehicular traffic and affect the park's air quality, soundscapes, night skies, and wildlife.

- The restoration projects recommended in the park's 2005 general management plan are some of the Park Service's highest priorities. The park relies largely on volunteers to assist with restoration work, so maintaining momentum on projects is important to help keep them engaged and enthusiastic. Delaying restoration projects could result in loss of those critical supporters. The earthworks built by the Union Army are the park's most sensitive cultural resource, and the improvements to access and stabilization outlined in the general management plan are critical to maintaining the only physical manifestation of the Union Army's presence at Pea Ridge.
- Pea Ridge National Military Park currently has four full-time staff within the maintenance division and no



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full-time interpretive staff. Park managers have identified the need for three full-time positions in each area to properly care for and interpret the park's resources.

- Several baseline research reports are critically needed to guide park management and planning, including a park-wide cultural landscape inventory and report, a historic resource study, an ethnographic overview and assessment, and historic structure reports for the Federal earthworks. The park would also like to complete additional archaeological surveys of the battlefield to gather information to enhance interpretation.
- Research on and monitoring of Pea Ridge's flora and fauna is lacking and needs to be addressed with more extensive ecological studies. Research is needed to better understand animal and plant population numbers and continued monitoring is needed to track environmental quality. The Park Service's Heartland Network Inventory and Monitoring Program has begun addressing these needs and has generated lists of the park's mammal, reptile, amphibian, avian, fish, and plant species; has produced two ecological and natural resource overview documents; and is planning aquatic invertebrate, fish, and additional water-quality monitoring in the near future.
- Non-native invasive species are a significant threat to the integrity of Pea Ridge's habitats due to their ability to colonize, overrun, and disrupt ecosystems. Non-native plants dominate portions of nearly all fields and road corridors in the park. They may also become established when eastern red cedar trees

are removed to restore prairies, fields, and savannas. To prevent this, these areas should be monitored for invasive plants.

WHAT'S BEING DONE

- Pea Ridge National Military Park is working to restore as much of the park's habitats, historic viewscapes, fences, and roads as possible to their Civil War-era appearance. For example, 90 acres of native tallgrass prairie have been replanted, and the park mows about 560 additional acres to maintain them as open fields. Two historic orchards, one apple and one peach, have been replanted with the help of local Boys and Girls Clubs and Unilever employees. In an effort to re-create the scenery that soldiers witnessed during the Civil War battle, the park has removed 2,500 feet of power lines (and has plans to remove another 8,500), planted more than 2,000 trees in areas that were forested in 1862, rebuilt 17 miles of fence, and restored five miles of historic roads and road traces. In addition, the Park Service is working to control eastern red cedar trees, which are encroaching on the park's open fields.
- The park's black powder program is popular with visitors. Black powder cannons were important pieces of artillery used during the Battle of Pea Ridge. Pea Ridge National Military Park purchased its first firing black powder cannon in 2007, and it has since acquired an additional working cannon. Park staff and trained volunteers fire the cannons multiple times a year during performances for school groups,

demonstrations, and during volunteer work days. In addition to these working cannons, the park has a total of 58 cannon carriages, 29 of which are outfitted with tubes that are on display for visitors.

- In 2005, Pea Ridge received a \$25,000 donation from Wal-Mart to install new interpretive wayside exhibits, which were completed in 2006. The Park Service is also working to install 14 new museum exhibits by 2010.

ABOUT NPCA AND THE CENTER FOR STATE OF THE PARKS

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come. NPCA initiated the State of the Parks program in 2000 to assess the condition of natural and cultural resources in the parks.

CONTACT US

For a copy of NPCA's full report on Pea Ridge National Military Park, to get copies of reports on other parks, or for more information about the Center for State of the Parks, visit www.npca.org/stateoftheparks or contact Dr. James Nations, vice president for the Center for State of the Parks, at jnations@npca.org. For more information on Pea Ridge National Military Park, contact NPCA's Southeast Regional Program Manager Emily Jones at 865.329.2424 or ejones@npca.org, or visit the park online at www.nps.gov/peri.