

Center for State of the Parks



WILSON'S CREEK NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD

SNAPSHOT

The Battle of Wilson's Creek was the first major Civil War struggle over Missouri, a state pivotal in the struggle to control the Mississippi River. The battle took place in southwest Missouri on August 10, 1861, and ended with a Confederate victory. Despite winning the battle, the Confederacy was unable to gain control of the state.

Wilson's Creek National Battlefield was established in 1960, largely through the work of the Wilson's Creek National Battlefield Foundation (established in 1950), which purchased battlefield acreage and worked with the Park Service to transfer the land and establish a national park.

The park is home to the Wilson's Creek Civil War Museum, the largest assemblage of Civil War artifacts (trans-Mississippi).

In addition to a wealth of cultural resources, the park protects several natural habitats that support numerous plant and animal species, including several that are federally listed as threatened or endangered. In 2008, more than 120,000 people visited Wilson's Creek National Battlefield to learn about Civil War history and enjoy the park's scenic beauty through recreational activities such as running, hiking, bicycling, and horseback riding.



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Wilson's Creek National Battlefield preserves cultural resources and natural landscapes that relate to a pivotal time in the history of the United States.

CHALLENGES

- There is concern that future high-density development may occur within one mile of the park (particularly with the growth of Springfield to the north and east and Republic to the north and west). About 1,800 acres near the park are expected to be developed in the near future, with predicted effects on the park's natural resources (e.g., vehicle accidents resulting in wildlife deaths and an increase in pollutant-laden runoff making its way into park waters) and

its ability to preserve the battlefield and the surrounding viewshed as they were seen by Civil War soldiers.

- Wilson's Creek's wayside exhibits were installed in 1982 and are now outdated, and the park does not have any permanent staff solely dedicated to interpretation. Just two staff members provide interpretive services to about 120,000 visitors annually, among their other many duties. Increased funding for both additional staff and updated exhibits would allow the park to better interpret resources and give visitors a more meaningful park experience. According to the park's 2005 business plan, Wilson's Creek needs 2.4 full-time equivalent employees for educational outreach and interpretation and seven seasonal positions within the visitor services division.
- The park does not have the funds needed to hire sufficient staff to remove non-native invasive plants from the battlefield, replant native prairie grasses, or restore limestone glades. The park also needs access to experts to help monitor and supervise such landscape rehabilitation projects. Additional staffing needs at the park include a full-time historian, a museum curator, and a museum technician.
- The City of Springfield's Southwest Wastewater Treatment Plant discharges an estimated 42.5 million gallons of treated wastewater into



National Parks Conservation Association®
Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations®

Wilson's Creek each day. Problems such as coliform contamination can also occur as a result of periodic accidental spills. Water quality at the park is also threatened by contaminated storm-water runoff from the nearby communities of Battlefield, Republic, and Springfield.

- Wilson's Creek National Battlefield contains approximately 37.5 acres of limestone glade—rare habitat that is disappearing in the region due to urban development. Threats to the park's limestone glades include encroachment by eastern red cedars, which has been facilitated by a century and a half of fire suppression; invasion by non-native plants; and trampling by visitors. The park began restoring its glades in 1970; these efforts are affected by limited funding and staff capacity.
- According to a 2001 Park Service report, invasive non-native plants have "disturbed" or "infested" approximately 1,100 acres of Wilson's Creek National Battlefield. Currently, the park must control non-native species on its own, as time and funds allow. Park staff would like the additional help a regionally based Park Service exotic plant management team could provide.

WHAT'S BEING DONE

- Park staff are currently restoring savanna and grassland habitats by removing trees and shrubs, controlling non-native invasive plant species with herbicides and prescribed burns, and reseeding some areas with native species. In 2007,

non-native invasive plants were cleared from 200 acres, and several historic fields were replanted with native plants and agricultural crops. As with glade restoration efforts, insufficient federal funding and staff capacity limit the work that can be done.

- The park recently installed fire suppression systems in two of its historic structures (McElhaney House and Ray House) and restored another (Edwards Cabin).
- In 2005, the park acquired the Sweeny Collection (subsequently renamed the Wilson's Creek Civil War Museum), an impressive assemblage of about 8,200 original Civil War artifacts relating to the war west of the Mississippi River. The park is currently developing a plan to build an addition to its visitor center to accommodate the collection and make it more accessible to visitors. The Wilson's Creek National Battlefield Foundation has hired an architect and an exhibit planner to complete the plans for the addition that will house the collection.
- Wilson's Creek National Battlefield encompasses 80 percent of the land where the historic battle took place. As part of the effort to achieve the Park Service's goal of protecting 95 percent of the original battlefield, the park recently acquired 155 acres on the west side of the park's existing boundary from the Wilson's Creek National Battlefield Foundation.
- The park is taking steps to employ green building standards and reduce its environmental footprint. Recycled carpet was installed in the

visitor center, and the park hopes to build an addition to the visitor center using green building techniques. Photovoltaic lights illuminate the visitor center and photovoltaic panels light the park's entrance sign. A hybrid vehicle further reduces the park's resource use and its contributions to atmospheric pollution.

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 Wilson's Creek National Battlefield, 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 Wilson's Creek National Battlefield, visit the park online at www.nps.gov/wicr.