

Center for State of the Parks



HARPERS FERRY NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

SNAPSHOT

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park sits at the confluence of the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers and at the crossroads of American history. Meriwether Lewis visited Harpers Ferry in 1803, to procure weapons, ammunition, and other provisions for the Corps of Discovery. John Brown targeted the federal armory and arsenal there for his historic raid to forward the abolition movement in 1859. During the Civil War, a flanking maneuver by General Stonewall Jackson led to the largest surrender of American troops until the Second World War. Harpers Ferry was also the site of the Niagara Movement, a 1906 gathering of civil rights activists led by W.E.B Du Bois.

In 2007, nearly 250,000 people visited Harpers Ferry National Historical Park to tour the park on guided ranger walks, hike some of the park's 18 miles of trails, view more than 150 historic structures, and learn more about the history of the area via interpretive way-sides and exhibits.

CHALLENGES

- **Landscapes at risk:** The area surrounding the park is rapidly developing, and this construction threatens the park's historical landscapes, impacts ecosystems along park borders, and affects the park's



Harpers Ferry has been a part of many historical events.

ability to interpret 19th-century historical events. A 2004 boundary expansion allowed the park to acquire key adjacent lands, but several priority areas remain at risk of development.

- **Staffing shortfalls:** Harpers Ferry National Historical Park suffers from an overall lack of cultural resource, natural resource, and facility management staff. The park's business plan recommends the addition of nine full-time staff for each program, but an operational funding shortfall has prevented the park from hiring the additional staff needed to ade-

quately protect natural and cultural resources. The business plan indicates the facility management division is short 15.5 staff. Harpers Ferry is also unable to fill critical existing positions due to funding shortfalls.

- **Natural resources threats:** Rare plant populations at Harpers Ferry are among the park's most significant natural resources, yet the park does not have the funding to monitor these species. Some of the rare plant species represent the only recorded local populations of those plants. Invasive plants are among the most serious threats to rare and sensitive plant populations.
- **Studies needed:** Harpers Ferry's cultural resources need further documentation, including archaeological



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surveys, cultural landscape studies, and historic resource studies. These surveys and studies will help park staff better protect and interpret resources for visitors.

- **Stories to tell:** The stories of early 19th-century immigrants and American Indians have not been fully researched or told at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. Study into the contributions of these groups to the area would add to the richness of the park's historical interpretation.
- **Inadequate museum storage:** Park staff recognize the need to improve the park's storage capacity for its museum collection and archives. Much of the park's museum collection is stored off-site, and existing storage and exhibition spaces at the park do not meet museum standards.
- **Fighting destructive insects:** Gypsy moths threaten the park's forests and the species they support by defoliating trees and shrubs. The park treated about 2,500 acres with a biological pesticide and a viral insecticide in early May 2008, and a recent inventory indicates the treatment was nearly 100 percent successful in reducing the gypsy moth populations, but about 200 additional acres may need to be treated in 2009.

WHAT'S BEING DONE

- **Improved visitor services:** Harpers Ferry's staff has worked extremely hard to improve the interpretation of and access to the park's resources for visitors, including adding more interpretive waysides and building new trails. These exhibits and trails allow visitors to access and understand the historic

significance of locations within the park, such as the battlefields on Bolivar Heights and School House Ridge where Confederate and Union forces fought in 1862.

- **Station restoration:** In 2007, the park reopened the historic Baltimore and Ohio Harpers Ferry Train Station following a three-year restoration. The fully restored building includes an interpretive exhibit on the history of the train station and is an asset to the community of Harpers Ferry.
- **Preservation collaboration:** Park staff work with local stakeholders and conservation and historic preservation organizations to preserve the park's viewshed.
- **Partnership project:** Harpers Ferry National Historical Park has participated in an innovative peregrine falcon reintroduction and tracking program in conjunction with several partners. Between 2001 and 2005, 29 birds were released within the park with the hope that some will return as breeding adults. The park needs funds to continue the project.
- **Upcoming events:** The Park Service is working with local tourism offices and as part of a four-state committee to plan a variety of events in 2009 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of John Brown's historic raid. See the park's website for details: www.nps.gov/hafe.
- **Community support:** The park relies on support from gateway communities and preservation organizations to help protect resources. Gateway communities see the park as a partner and an asset that boosts local economies and contributes to the communities' quality of life. Many community leaders have been

pivotal in advocating for compatible adjacent land use, boundary expansions, and increases in funding.

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. The goal is to provide information that will help policymakers, the public, and the National Park Service improve resource conditions in national parks, celebrate successes as models for other parks, and ensure a lasting legacy for future generations.

CONTACT US

For a copy of NPCA's full report on Harpers Ferry National Historical 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 Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, contact NPCA's West Virginia Field Office Manager Erin Haddix St. John at 304.469.4433 or estjohn@npca.org, or visit the park online at www.nps.gov/hafe. To learn more about what the public and our elected officials can do to help improve the health of this park, visit www.npca.org/take_action.