

PRESS RELEASE



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Washington Smart Growth Alliance Identifies Civil War Forts as a Top Conservation Priority

Washington, DC – A circle of Civil War forts and earthworks erected in defense of the nation’s capital is one of six areas named today by the Washington Smart Growth Alliance (WSGA) as a 2008 regional conservation priority.

The Fort Circle Parks have long been envisioned as part of a regional park system, connected by a drive or greenway. In 1902, the McMillan Plan designated the forts as a belt of green parkland around the city, and a 1964 plan called for a drive connecting the forts. While the earlier plans weren’t implemented, the proposal received renewed attention as part of CapitalSpace, a joint parks initiative undertaken by the National Capital Planning Commission, the National Park Service, and the District of Columbia.

The Fort Circle Parks’ legacy in defense of the nation’s capital and in incubating communities of newly-freed African Americans has largely been lost. Many fortifications that remain are deteriorated and lacking in interpretive and educational materials.

“As part of the CapitalSpace project, the partners aim to link the parks through a system of walkable, bikeable, greened streets and trails that also connect to the surrounding communities and waterfronts, and to local, regional, and national trail systems,” said NCPC Executive Director Marcel Acosta, who attended today’s announcement. “Our goal is to increase awareness about the forts’ cultural and historic significance while also enhancing access to the region’s remarkable park system.”

A newly formed Alliance to Preserve the Civil War Defenses of Washington is supporting the project by seeking funding to provide for the forts’ physical preservation and maintenance, to enhance the visitor experience and improve pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular connections between the forts.

Other projects identified today by the Washington Smart Growth Alliance include the restoration of 40 original boundary stones that outlined the District of Columbia; the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail along the tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay; Long Bridge Park in Arlington County; Dove’s Landing in Prince William County; and George Washington’s Maryland Conservation Area across the Potomac from Mount Vernon.

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The Smart Growth Alliance's programs seek to promote the overall sustainability of the region by encouraging smart growth alternatives that can be more affordable for citizens in the short term and more sustainable over the long term.

The Conservation Priorities report released by the Alliance notes that by 2030, the National Capital Region is expected to increase by two million people and more than 1.6 million jobs, adding pressure to historic sites and natural environments.

“In the face of concerns about climate change and rising energy costs, the prospect of this growth raises serious questions about the patterns of land use and development in this region,” said Sam Black, president of the Smart Growth Alliance. “In fact, the typical suburban growth patterns we continue to experience are probably not sustainable, especially over the long term.”

The Smart Growth Alliance noted that *smart conservation*—preserving working open space, parkland or natural areas and restoring green components of urban environments—can help shape growth patterns over time, as well as enhance land stewardship, air and water quality, and quality of life.

All six conservation priorities were chosen by an independent jury that reviews numerous nominations and selects projects that offer the most promise or that are of the highest urgency.

“We focus on preserving green space, capital projects that will benefit the natural environment, and restoration of blighted parcels, places or resources,” said Lee Epstein, lands program director at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and chairman of the Alliance's conservation jury.

Epstein added that the jury also selects projects that can benefit most from independent support as they seek to increase public awareness, obtain critically needed funding or legislative support, or gain local or regional consensus or approval.

“By providing business and real estate support for conservation, this program mirrors our Smart and Sustainable Growth program, which provides support of smart growth development in the region by conservation interests,” said Deborah Westbrooke, executive director of the Alliance, which is made up of real estate, business, environmental, and affordable housing organizations.

For more information on the Fort Circle Parks and the CapitalSpace initiative, visit www.capitalspace.gov. For more information on the Alliance and this year's conservation priorities, visit the Smart Growth Alliance at www.SGAlliance.org.

The National Capital Planning Commission is the federal government's central planning agency in the District of Columbia and surrounding counties in Maryland and Virginia. The Commission provides overall planning guidance for federal land and buildings in the region. It also reviews the design of federal projects and memorials, oversees long-range planning for future development, and monitors capital investment by federal agencies.