



United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Resources, Community, and
Economic Development Division

B-259210

November 15, 1994

The Honorable Trent Lott
United States Senate

Dear Senator Lott:

In response to your request and subsequent agreements with your office, we are collecting information on the condition of monuments at Civil War sites managed by the National Park Service (NPS). Concerned about whether NPS is properly maintaining the monuments at these locations, you asked us to provide you with information on (1) the overall condition of the monuments at these sites and (2) cost estimates for replacing or repairing monuments in poor condition.

On October 25, 1994, we provided your office with a briefing on the progress of our work. At that time, we had completed work at one NPS site--the Vicksburg National Military Park--in Vicksburg, Mississippi. Your office requested that we conduct our field work there first, since you are familiar with that location and since it is one of the major Civil War battle sites within the NPS system. At the conclusion of the meeting, we agreed to provide you with this letter documenting the results of our work at Vicksburg. We relied on information provided to us by the Park Service and, as agreed, performed limited checking of the information at Vicksburg. In addition, we agreed to provide by early next year a final report on the condition of monuments at major Civil War sites managed by NPS.

In summary, the information provided to us by NPS shows that most monuments at the Vicksburg National Military Park are in good condition, meaning that they need no repair or rehabilitation. The data maintained by NPS and our visit to the Park showed that 2 of the Park's 640 monuments are in poor condition and need substantial repair. NPS officials estimate that it may cost more than \$1 million to repair one of the monuments and \$3,200 to \$4,000 to repair the other.

Overall Condition of Monuments
at Vicksburg National Military Park

To inventory and track the condition of historic structures at NPS units, NPS headquarters maintains a centralized data base that, among other things, identifies monuments in a park and categorizes their condition.¹ The data base places each monument in one of four defined conditions--good, fair, poor, or unknown. The definition of each of these conditions is included in the enclosure to this letter. Generally, a monument in good condition needs no repair or rehabilitation; a monument in fair condition shows early signs of wear or deterioration but does not need significant repair or rehabilitation; and a monument in poor condition needs significant repair or rehabilitation. A monument's condition is categorized as unknown when there is not enough information to make a determination about its condition. NPS updated the information in the data base for Vicksburg during the summer of 1994.

The NPS data base identified 640 monuments at the Vicksburg National Military Park. These monuments were categorized as follows:

- 621 (97 percent) were in good condition,
- 16 (3 percent) were in fair condition,
- 2 (less than 1 percent) were in poor condition, and
- 1 (less than 1 percent) was in unknown condition.

We visited the Vicksburg National Military Park on October 18, 1994, to discuss the information in the data base with Vicksburg Park officials and to obtain cost estimates for repairing or rehabilitating the monuments identified as being in poor condition. During this visit, we reviewed

¹The information in this letter does not include cemetery headstones, metal tablets, or location markers in the park. Vicksburg National Military Park has over 18,000 cemetery headstones and 400 tablets and markers.

the data with Park officials and observed the condition of numerous monuments.²

Vicksburg Park officials generally agreed with the data in the NPS data base. However, they did identify two discrepancies in the data. One discrepancy involved one of the two monuments identified as being in poor condition. The other discrepancy involved the monument identified as being in unknown condition. In each case, the officials stated that the discrepancy probably occurred because the data were incorrectly entered into the data base.

The two monuments categorized in the NPS data base as being in poor condition were the Mississippi State Memorial Monument and the 1st U.S. Missouri Light Artillery Batteries B, E, F Monument. The information we obtained at Vicksburg confirmed that the Mississippi State Monument was in poor condition. However, the other monument Vicksburg officials identified as being in poor condition was not the 1st Missouri Monument but the 19th, 20th, 34th, 38th Iowa Infantry Monument. Officials at Vicksburg also told us that the monument whose condition was identified as unknown in the NPS data base was in fact in good condition.

Description of and Estimated Cost to
Repair the Two Monuments in Poor Condition

The Mississippi State Monument is a 76-foot granite monument with large bronze panels and statuettes depicting battlefield scenes. The structure was completed in 1912. The deterioration of the monument is apparent even to an untrained observer. Because of this obvious deterioration, NPS requested an independent assessment of the monument's condition with options and costs for restoration. The assessment was completed by a private engineering firm, which issued a report in 1989.³ The report details problems in the bronze, including discoloration, corrosion, cracks, fissures, and misalignment of panels, all of which

²We observed a monument that was toppled as a result of weather or vandalism. However, the Park does not consider toppled monuments as being in poor condition if they are otherwise intact. A Park official told us that repairing a toppled monument is a simple maintenance task.

³Restoration of Mississippi State Monument, prepared by Entech, Inc., for NPS, July 1989.

B-259210

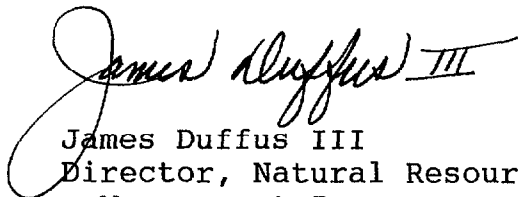
have led to serious deterioration of the bronze work. The report indicates that unless action is taken to halt the deterioration, the monument will eventually be beyond repair. We have made this report available to your staff.

The engineering firm's report offers several alternatives for repairing the monument. These include temporary repairs to the panels and statuettes, complete repairs to the original bronze, and replacement of the bronze with new castings. Cost estimates for these alternatives ranged from \$34,000 for temporary repairs to over \$520,000 for replacement of the bronze work. However, it should be noted that (1) these estimates are over 5 years old and (2) the cost of some repairs to the granite part of the monument, which the report recommended, is not included in these estimates. Park officials at Vicksburg told us that, in their opinion, the cost to permanently repair this monument today would probably exceed \$1 million.

The other monument identified by Park officials as being in poor condition is the 19th, 20th, 34th, 38th Iowa Infantry Monument. This monument is a 9.5-foot by 5.5-foot by 15-foot gray granite monument erected in 1905. All four of this monument's bronze inscription tablets have been missing for 15 years, likely as a result of being vandalized. A park official told us that in 1979, the cost to replace all four tablets was approximately \$600. However, the Park decided at that time not to replace the tablets because the monument is in an isolated area. NPS officials estimated that the cost to replace each of the tablets today would be \$800 to \$1,000, for a total cost of \$3,200 to \$4,000. Park officials indicated that, because of lack of funds, they have no current plans to repair or rehabilitate either of these monuments.

Should you have questions about this letter or need additional information, please call me at (202) 512-7756.

Sincerely yours,



James Duffus III
Director, Natural Resources
Management Issues

Enclosure

DEFINITIONS OF THE CONDITION OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE'S
HISTORIC STRUCTURES

- Good:** The structure and significant features are intact, structurally sound, and performing their intended purpose. The structure and significant features need no repair or rehabilitation but only routine or preventive maintenance.
- Fair:** There are early signs of wear, failure, or deterioration through the structure and its features are generally sound and performing their intended purpose; or there is failure of a significant feature of the structure.
- Poor:** The significant features are no longer performing their intended purpose; or significant features are missing; or deterioration or damage affects more than 25 percent of the structure; or the structure or significant features show signs of imminent failure or breakdown.
- Unknown:** Not enough information is available to make a determination.
- Source:** National Park Service.

(140327)

