

G E O R G I A

BATTLEFIELDS

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Electricity failure may affect preservation

The 14 August electric grid failure in the Northeast and Midwest may affect preservation efforts throughout the country, especially in Georgia. In the wake of the blackout, many analysts are citing the inadequacy of power transmission lines and arguing for new ones. One version of the energy bill currently before Congress proposes allowing electricity transmission towers to be built on private land.

While the power lines may have caused the failure and while a good argument can be made to upgrade the system regardless, the construction of power line towers frequently concerns preservationists. Environmentalists often share these concerns, but this situation brings property rights advocates onto our side, whereas we more usually find ourselves in opposite camps.

Georgia law is very favorable towards power line construction. Earlier this year, the Georgia Supreme Court ruled that Cobb and Rabun County moratoriums on power line construction were unconstitutional. Consequently, the power transmission companies continue to be able to exercise eminent domain. Relief from this ruling can come only from constitutional change, and the recent blackout will make legislative and executive branches even less inclined to take any action that appears to impede reliable delivery of electricity.

Overhead power lines detract from the visual presentation of a landscape and reduce one's ability to imagine how a historic site appeared during the war. In some instances, the construction and maintenance of support towers damages historic ground. On the other side, power companies correctly argue that burying the transmission lines is more expensive and that maintenance takes longer and costs more for buried lines than for overhead lines.

Demonizing the power transmission companies is tempting, but we should also recognize that we all want reliable electric service. Contact your representatives to voice your opinion.

Brown's Mill site targeted for development

Late in 2001, Coweta County bought 104 acres near Brown's Mill, site of a 31 July 1864 cavalry clash in which Major General Joe Wheeler's Confederates scattered a Federal raiding column under Brigadier General Ed McCook. (See July 2001 newsletter.) Coweta County hired Jaeger & Company to prepare a site master plan and New South Associates to conduct archaeological research. A preview of the plan was presented on 26 August in Newnan.

Also on 26 August, the Coweta County Planning & Zoning Department hosted a meeting to discuss development threats to the Brown's Mill site. Participating were: historian David Evans, author of the definitive book on Federal cavalry operations during the Atlanta Campaign ([Sherman's Horsemen](#), Indiana U. Press, 1996), Coweta County planners, and representatives from GBA, the Georgia Civil War Commission, the Civil War Preservation Trust, the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Newnan-Coweta Historical Society.

Since the cavalry battle ranged over a wide area, the parcel owned by the county doesn't cover all the historic ground; and 168 acres (fortunately not on the core battlefield) will soon be developed. Since the developer's plans already meet the present zoning requirements (single family homes on large lots), stopping this development is unlikely. However, the developer will be asked to consider a buffer. Perhaps more importantly, the meeting participants agreed on the need to contact the owners of three other large tracts (all over 60 acres) that are closer to the core battlefield before development reaches their land. The hope is that the owners will agree to conservation easements or provisions for preservation whenever the land changes hands. Such a proactive approach is increasingly important as the suburbs of Atlanta move outward.

New Federal preservation program may be cut 80%

The Civil War Battlefield Preservation Act of 2002, signed by President Bush last December (see January 2003 newsletter), authorized \$50 million for battlefield preservation: \$10 million each fiscal year from 2004 through 2008; but authorization does not guarantee appropriation. The FY2004 budget currently under consideration by Congress contains only \$2 million for the program, an 80% reduction from the authorized amount. While the budget is always modified considerably before final enactment, this initial proposal reflects preservation's low priority.

Also, the periodic reauthorization of the national transportation bill (you may recognize prior year versions ISTEA and TEA-21) contains a proposal to allow states to determine the allocation of the entire amount they receive from the Federal government, rather than specifying that a portion of the total be spent on preservation. Both these legislative developments have understandable motivations (reducing spending and giving more power to the states), but their affect on preservation could be dire. GBA will keep you informed of the bills' ultimate contents.

Budget cuts planned for state historic sites and markers

Preservation-related spending will be cut as the state budget shrinks. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Commissioner Lonice Barrett outlined the potential impact of reductions in a 20 August presentation to the DNR Board. Complying with the governor's budget guidance, Barrett proposes to cut \$7.1 million (about 8%) of the DNR budget for FY2005 (1 July 2004 – 30 June 2005). He indicated three state parks might be closed and 69 positions deleted. Also eliminated in the proposal was funding for state historical marker maintenance. Current plans are to close down marker maintenance in November 2004 and not fund it at all in FY 2005.

About 850 of the over 2,200 state markers are Civil War-related. (See November 2002 newsletter for background on the marker program.) Marker maintenance (usually \$150,000 to \$200,000) has been left out of the governor's proposed budget before and then restored by the General Assembly (see December 2001 and May 2002 newsletters); but the state's economic situation is now more grim, so we can't assume the legislators will rescue the program.

Other state agencies will face similar reductions, but Commissioner Barrett was the first to provide such a detailed assessment of the impact. All agencies must submit their budget proposals to the Governor by 8 September. Contact the governor and your state senator and representative to let them know how you stand on preservation-related items.

Utoy Creek acquisition ceremony scheduled for 6 September

A ceremony to celebrate the preservation of Federal trenches near Utoy Creek is now scheduled for Saturday, 6 September 2003, starting at 9:30 a.m. at Beecher Hills Elementary School in Southwest Atlanta. The program will include environmental displays and a mountain biking demonstration as well as tours of the property, which contains trenches built by Federal soldiers. The XIV Corps headquarters was on this site for about a week in August 1864. See newsletters for March, April, August, September, and December 2002 for more background on the parcel.

This celebration marks the acquisition of 168 acres of Greenspace: Just over 100 acres are in the historically significant Lionel Hampton tract, and the rest are in the Beecher Hills tract. The Georgia Civil War Commission was instrumental in organizing the preservation effort. Much of the purchase price came from city and state funds earmarked for wetlands and from the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation.

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