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Battlefields Mean Business

*A Study of Economic and Community
Impact of America's Historic Battlefields
June 2026*



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE AND APPROACH

This study quantifies the economic contributions associated with visitation to American battlefield sites across the United States while providing deeper insight into visitor behavior and travel patterns. The analysis integrates three complementary components: (1) economic contribution modeling based on visitor spending, (2) mobile location data analysis at fifteen representative sites, and (3) a survey of American Battlefield Trust members and supporters. In addition, the results were compared and contrasted against the National Park Service’s Socioeconomic Monitoring Program (SEM), a national study of visitor research to park units, including several battlefields since 2021.

Together, these components provide both a national-scale assessment of economic contributions and site-level insights into how battlefield visitation functions within broader tourism systems. However, this study is unique in its approach and development. Past research at battlefields has not had the ability to understand larger-scale visitation dynamics in relation to economic contributions. The data was not available on the necessary scale or would be too difficult and/or expensive to collect through primary on-the-ground data collection.

SCALE OF ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

Battlefield visitation represents a meaningful and widely distributed component of the U.S. tourism economy. This report focuses on the units of the National Park System classified by that entity as its military history sites, stretching across 31 states and two territories. The table below represents the top-level findings from the national battlefield sites used in the analysis.

ANNUAL VISITOR SPENDING \$1.5 BILLION

JOBS SUPPORTED	15,000
TOTAL ECONOMIC OUTPUT	\$2.2 billion

These benefits are not limited to high-profile destinations. An estimated 4,360 jobs are supported in non-urban communities, including 780 jobs at lower-visitation sites, where battlefield tourism plays an important role in supporting local economies.

The economic contributions identified in this study are fundamentally enabled by the preservation and stewardship of battlefield landscapes. Visitation, and the associated spending, jobs, and economic activity, can only occur where these sites are protected, interpreted, and made accessible to the public.

Organizations such as the American Battlefield Trust and the National Park Service are therefore central not only to preserving cultural heritage, but also to sustaining the economic systems supported by battlefield tourism.

Among our findings are:

Battlefield sites function as part of broader tourism systems

Battlefields are rarely visited in isolation. Instead, they are integrated into multi-destination trips, extending visitor stays and increasing regional spending. Their economic value is therefore amplified through connections to surrounding attractions, communities, and travel corridors.

Overnight visitation drives economic value

While many battlefield sites serve local and day-use audiences, overnight visitors generate a disproportionate share of economic contributions, particularly through lodging, dining, and related expenditures. Length of stay is a key determinant of economic impact.

Battlefield tourism supports urban and rural economies differently

- In urban areas, high visitation volumes generate large total economic contributions.
- In rural and non-urban areas, battlefield tourism often represents a critical source of economic stability, supporting jobs and business activity where alternatives may be limited.

Visitor markets are highly engaged and repeat-oriented

Battlefield visitors demonstrate strong loyalty, frequently visiting multiple sites and returning over time. This behavior supports sustained visitation and long-term economic contributions.

Most sites serve regional audiences, with a subset functioning as destination anchors

Mobile location data indicates that most battlefield sites primarily draw visitors from within their home state or region. However, a smaller number of sites function as national or corridor destinations, attracting visitors traveling longer distances.

Site function shapes visitor behavior

Battlefields serve diverse roles, ranging from immersive heritage destinations to recreational open spaces. These roles influence dwell time, visitation patterns, and spending behavior, with implications for site management and investment strategies.

Preservation generates broader community value beyond economics

In addition to measurable economic contributions, battlefield preservation supports cultural heritage, education, open space conservation, and community identity. These non-market benefits are integral to the overall value of preservation, even if they are not fully captured in economic metrics.



IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING AND INVESTMENT

The findings of this study highlight several important considerations for stakeholders:

- Investments in preservation directly support economic activity
- Enhancing visitor experience and accessibility can increase length of stay and spending
- Strengthening connections between sites and surrounding destinations can amplify regional benefits
- Expanding outreach to younger and more diverse audiences is critical for long-term sustainability
- Strategies should reflect the distinct roles of different sites, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach

CONCLUSION

Battlefield sites are more than places of historical significance—they are active components of regional economies and tourism systems. The \$1.5 billion in visitor spending and 15,000 jobs supported annually reflect the scale of their economic contributions, while visitor behavior patterns demonstrate their role in shaping broader travel experiences.

At the same time, these contributions are inseparable from the preservation efforts that sustain them. Continued investment in protecting, interpreting, and connecting battlefield landscapes will be essential to maintaining both their cultural significance and their economic value in the years ahead.

