



Descendants of Buffalo Soldiers to Establish a Living History Site on the Eastern Shore

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Contact: Megan Sennett, Chesapeake Bay Trust, msennett@cbtrust.org, 410-974-2941 ext. 129

Allen, Maryland – Honoring Black History Month this day and every day, the Buffalo Soldier Committee will establish a living history site and interactive walking trail to educate visitors and commemorate African American history and heritage in Delmarva, thanks to a collaborative effort by the Committee, the Preservation Trust of Wicomico, and the Chesapeake Bay Trust (the Trust), who awarded a recent grant to the group to bring its vision to life.

“Buffalo Soldiers” were African American soldiers in cavalry and infantry units created by the Army Organization Act of 1866. They primarily served on the Western frontier and helped to escort settlers moving westward after the Civil War. While there are several memorials to these soldiers in the American West, their history has not been as frequently included in school curriculum and heritage sites on the East Coast.

Deborah Scott, the manager for the Buffalo Soldier Living History Site’s Eastern Shore project, seeks to correct this course. Scott’s vision pays homage to her grandfather, Thomas E. Polk, Sr., who served as a Buffalo Soldier after the U.S. Civil War. Polk started purchasing parcels of land in Allen in 1892, and now the Committee intends to transform some of the 22 acres that has been continuously owned by her family since then. They will establish an educational center to include “Hattie’s Trail,” a walking path named for Polk’s wife and Scott’s grandmother.

Scott remarks, “This site is going to exhume the history of the Buffalo Soldier that has been buried for far too long. It will be the first of its kind east of the Mississippi River. Our goal is that visitors will come here to see historical displays and exhibits, participate in workshops and presentations and experience reenactments.” She continues, “Our goal is to attract and welcome tourists from near and for to the lower Eastern Shore of Maryland.”

The Committee anticipates opening the entire site to the public in 2025.

The Committee is composed of descendants of Buffalo Soldiers and has partnerships with the Greater Washington, D.C. Chapter of 9th and 10th Buffalo Soldier Horse Cavalry Association, Salisbury University, and the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, and the Allen Historical Society. It is sponsored by The Preservation Trust of Wicomico County. Additionally, the project

has benefited from in-kind services provided by a technical advisor, an archaeologist, as well as other local fraternal organizations. Together, they all strive to bring the story of these soldiers to Delmarva.

EPA Chesapeake Bay Program director Kandis Boyd observes, “The Buffalo Soldiers are not just an iconic part of African American History, but also an important aspect of American History. The Buffalo Soldiers were some of the nation’s first caretakers of the national parks. So this is truly a full circle moment to watch history in the making as our early environmentalists, especially those of African descent, are honored with their own living history museum on the Eastern Shore.”

The Buffalo Soldier Living History Site was a 2022 recipient of the Trust’s Veterans’ Engagement Mini-Grant Program, designed to support veterans’ groups and organizations that engage veterans with healing and therapeutic services, outdoor recreation, and community engagement. “The members of the Buffalo Soldiers Committee are celebrating and bringing to life the history of this important group of veterans and their descendants. We are honored to partner with them through our veterans grant initiatives,” says Chesapeake Bay Trust president, Jana Davis.

About the Chesapeake Bay Trust

The Chesapeake Bay Trust (www.cbtrust.org) envisions a restored, protected, and resilient Chesapeake Bay watershed and other natural resources in our area, from the Coastal Bays to the Chesapeake to the Youghiogheny River. The Trust empowers about 400 local community-based groups each year with the resources they need to support veteran’s groups and organizations engaging veteran’s groups that provide healing and therapeutic services, outdoor recreation, community engagement, and green jobs training. Additionally, the Trust takes a meaningful and measurable role in restoring forests, streams, rivers, bays, wildlife, and more. Support for the Trust is provided by the sale of the Chesapeake Bay license plate; donations to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund on the Maryland State income tax form; donations made by hunters, fishers, and boaters in the Maryland online natural resource licensing system; donations from individuals and corporations; and partnerships with private foundations and federal, state, and local governments. On average, 90% of the Trust’s expenditures are directed to its restoration and education programs. The Trust has received the highest rating from Charity Navigator for over two decades.

About the Buffalo Soldier Living History Site Committee

The BSLHS Committee was founded by the grandchildren of Thomas E. Polk, Sr. the man for whom the site will be named. Comprised of a small board of people from varying backgrounds and experiences who have come together because of the passion for the purpose of the project. The Site will be used to educate both the local and broader communities as to the valor and courage of Black American soldiers who served in the Indian Territories and beyond. Those men were vital to the westward expansion of the United States of America when

they were called upon to help the government fulfil its mission of manifest destiny. While educating the public locally and nationally, activities at the site will engage the public and foster a sense of respect for the service and sacrifices made by Buffalo Soldiers and lead to a greater awareness of myriad odds that confronted Black American soldiers as they served after the Civil War.

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