

**Present landscape reflects**  
**historic appearance in**  
**Washita Battlefield National Historic Site**



Washita Battlefield National Historic Site in Oklahoma may be in an enviable position. Park staff and volunteers have nearly eliminated tamarisk from the site. The Natural Resource Challenge through an Exotic Plant Management Team (EPMT) enabled this accomplishment. There are some caveats, however: tamarisk remains along an ephemeral tributary of the Washita River, and a major effort will have to be maintained to combat new sprouts and diminish upstream seed sources. Nevertheless, all standing tamarisk along the 1.25 miles of the Washita River that flows through the park has been cut down. The Chihuahuan Desert–Shortgrass Prairie EPMT (based in Carlsbad Caverns National Park) is anticipated to return to Washita Battlefield at least two more times over the winter-spring of 2003–2004. These trips will focus on cutting and treating the remaining tamarisk lining the tributary, and revisiting previously treated areas where tamarisk saplings have resprouted.

Park managers understand that Washita Battlefield National Historic Site does not represent ecosystem-level processes. Furthermore, eliminating tamarisk (or any other exotic) from within its boundaries has little effect on the untold acres of nonnative plants present on the

agricultural lands of the surrounding Great Plains. Yet Washita Battlefield is a cultural (and natural) landscape, sacred to the Cheyenne, Arapaho, and other tribes affiliated with the site. The enabling legislation of the historic site requires the National Park Service to return the battlefield as closely as possible to its appearance in 1868, the year of the battle. For all the visitors who come to the site trying to imagine the altercation between the U.S. Cavalry and the Plains Indians 135 years ago, it is important that the landscape reflect its historic appearance. By removing a visually intrusive, nonnative tree from along the length of the Washita River, the National Park Service has honored its enabling legislation and improved the experience of visitors.

*Kurt Foote is currently the Natural Resource Program Manager at Vicksburg National Military Park, Mississippi. He can be reached at [kurt\\_foote@nps.gov](mailto:kurt_foote@nps.gov).*

