



A New Park Program Plan: The RSS

Consistent with the current NPS Park Planning Framework is a category of park-specific “park program plans” that tier directly off of the park General Management Plan (GMP). Included among these plans is the park’s Resource Stewardship Strategy (RSS), a document designed to provide (1) an objective basis for assessing the condition of natural and cultural resources relative to the “desired conditions” established in the park GMP, and (2) to document science- and scholarship-based comprehensive strategies to achieve and maintain these desired conditions. These subject-matter expert reviewed strategies consist of a logical sequence over time of general and interrelated activities determined to be necessary to, if not actually achieve or maintain, advance the current condition of the park’s resources toward their desired conditions.

Improved Accountability

The role of the RSS’s comprehensive strategies is to guide and provide improved accountability for the park’s multi-year cumulative monetary investment in resource stewardship. The benchmark target values - synonymous with having attained desired conditions - for the RSS’s measurable indicators provide park management with the means to assess both current resource condition in relation to desired condition and the effectiveness of management actions towards achieving or maintaining a desired condition.

Successor to Resource Management Plan (RMP)

The RSS retires the park Resource Management Plan (RMP), which as a type of implementation plan served a different role and function for parks. RMPs had become long on “project statements,” corresponding to either project needs or a base increase requests, or both, and relatively short on a clear objective depiction of what resource stewardship sought to achieve in the broader context of fulfilling the bureau’s mission, management policy, and a park’s GMP, considered to be a contract with the public on the resource conditions the NPS seeks to realize on their behalf.

Unlike other “plans” prepared to guide resource stewardship at the park level, the RSS is not a decision-making document. Instead this 15- to 20-year forward-looking instrument documents the comprehensive strategies necessary to inform park strategic planning, where decisions are made on the allocation of existing park base funds as well as those relating to requests for nonrecurring project funding and future base increase requests. The activities integrated into these strategies also serve as the basis for implementation planning through which project proposals are developed in detail in PMIS and base increase requests are entered into OFS so that the requisite funding and workload requirement information is also available to inform park strategic planning.

Integrating Other Program Activities and Information

The RSS serves as a catalyst for integrating and leveraging multiple existing efforts by the NPS in a variety of program areas. Examples include: desired conditions, both park-wide and by geographic management zone, established in GMPs prepared by the park planning and special studies program and adopted by the RSS; park watershed condition assessments providing needed broad-scope, synthesized descriptions of reference conditions for park resources and the identification of stressors on these systems by the water resource program; established indicators, monitoring protocols and data quality management by the vital signs monitoring program to serve as a basis for RSS measurable indicators of desired conditions and discerning current conditions; condition of historic structures through consistent assessment criteria by the park historic structures and landscapes program; and condition assessments of assets designed or adopted for natural resource stewardship purposes performed by the park facility management program.

Status of RSSs In Parks

As a new concept the prototype RSS was developed in FY 2006-FY 2007 for Herbert Hoover NHS by an interdisciplinary team from the park with assistance provided by subject-matter experts (SMEs) from the Midwest Regional Office, Heartland (Vital Signs) Network, and Midwest Archeological Center based on the park’s fundamental and other important natural and cultural resources.

Based on the lessons learned through the prototype experience seven regional pilot RSSs were initiated in FY 2006-FY 2007, one in each region. This first round of regional pilot RSS parks, partially supported by central office funds, include Denali NP&Pres, Guadalupe Mountains NP, Effigy Mounds NM, Monocacy NB, New River Gorge NR, Point Reyes NS, and Chattahoochee NRA. A second round of ten centrally supported regional pilot parks is scheduled to begin in FY 2008. As field staff gain experience with the preparation of an RSS and further lessons are learned from the first round of regional pilots it is anticipated that additional parks will elect to initiate their own RSS using their own locally controlled funds.

The next page illustrates the RSS’s relationship to the park planning framework, example relationships with other key natural resource programs, and the implementation of management actions and adaptive management.

