

MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

of the

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



July 1975

Mission

"...The service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations, hereinafter specified, by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of said parks, monuments and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

--National Park Service Act, 1916

The intent of this language is clear: to care for the parks, to help the public enjoy the parks, and to do both in ways that insure the integrity of the parks for continued use beyond our time. In addition, each park has a more specific purpose defined or deduced from its authorizing legislation. These specific park acts, and numerous other laws and Executive orders containing additional authorities and compliance requirements, supplement the basic mission. While Service responsibilities have grown and the number and variety of parks have increased, the basic mission of the Service and the central purpose for which it was created remain firm and unchanging.

Nevertheless, changes do occur--brought about by a changing society and the changing needs and desires of that society. These changes influence our emphasis on the elements of our mission. For instance, in the early years of the Service there was need to promote visitation to the parks. That was the emphasis of another era. Promotion today stresses dispersal of visitors to less known and less impacted areas.

A brief historical perspective on the National Park Service and System allows us to understand and evaluate the present demands upon it.

Evolution and Growth of the System and the Service

The National Park System has evolved in 103 years from a single national park--Yellowstone--to a national system of 286 areas that run the environmental gamut from Manhattan Island to the wilds of Alaska.

Once identified primarily with the West, today over half of the units in the System are located east of the Mississippi.

Once consisting primarily of natural areas, the System today has 167 historical and cultural areas preserving the tangible remains and intangible associations of the broad sweep of American history.

Once mainly a group of mountain parks, the System today contains 35 areas in the recreation category across the Nation, including superlative seashores, lakeshores, river valleys, and mammoth reservoirs.

New areas continue to be authorized. Proposals now before Congress would establish or enlarge 11 parks in Alaska, approximately doubling the acreage of the present System. Significant historical areas continue to be added to assure the preservation of the Nation's historical legacy.

The Congress has recently added three national recreation areas in major urban settings, and proposals for others are before it. The System is thus becoming increasingly important to all segments of our society.

The Service also has responsibilities beyond the boundaries of the System. The Service administers, for the Secretary of the Interior, a matching grants-in-aid program for the acquisition and rehabilitation of historic properties; it maintains the National Register of Historic Places, as well as registers of natural and environmental education landmarks, and supports studies to identify significant historic and natural areas.

The Service has primary responsibility for preserving and/or salvaging architectural and archeological resources on Federal lands or on projects having Federal involvement. The National Park Service also plays an important role in exchanging information and technical assistance with other levels of government and with other nations. These efforts provide mutual benefits, contribute significantly to the accomplishment of the National Park Service mission, support environmental quality, and promote the world park movement.

The National Park System and the Service have evolved and grown in size and responsibility, resulting in the need to reassess and realign priorities and to develop innovative approaches to meet today's needs.

Management Direction

The growth of the National Park System, the addition of new responsibilities by Congressional and administrative actions, and economic factors have affected the Service's capability to perform all of its many responsibilities within its existing means.

In performing its mission, the Service is at times circumscribed by limitations of personnel and money. It is anticipated that, for the foreseeable future, our mission must be accomplished without significant increases of these managerial resources. Therefore, we must recognize such limitations and place our management emphasis on those functions deemed essential to the accomplishment of our mission on a Systemwide basis.

Given the areas of management and program emphasis both explicitly and implicitly noted in this document, current planning, development and operational proposals and programs will sort out as strongly mission-supportive, or as moderately or dubiously mission-supportive. An identification of transferable managerial resources will thus result.

The following areas of policy overview and management emphasis outline Servicewide objectives in terms which are sufficiently broad to have Servicewide application and allow the necessary flexibility for management and program innovation at all levels. This document is the base of our management by objectives system and is to be used in setting objectives at all levels.

Resource Management

The resources of the National Park System are diverse national treasures entrusted to the Service to be passed on unimpaired to future generations. They include outstanding natural ecosystems; irreplaceable historic and prehistoric structures and objects; intangible aspects of the Nation's culture; vast reservoirs; and highly developed and intensively managed urban recreation resources. These are the base for quality visitor use and enjoyment.

The National Park Service mission is above all a command to perpetuate those inherent qualities for which each park was established. This must be our primary concern.

All resources thus require sensitive professional management based on adequate knowledge and application of appropriate techniques.

In the management of all resources, the Service must:

Establish a classification system which recognizes the inherent qualities of a given resource and distinguishes between management needs of natural, historic, and recreational zones, regardless of the general category of each park.

Clearly identify specific park-related resource inventory and research needs and direct management resources to meet those needs.

Develop training and educational opportunities based on specific identifiable resource management, maintenance, and operational needs.

Examine the potential for contracting appropriate services and functions.

Develop and utilize energy-efficient processes.

Historic Resources

Historic resources consist of man-made fabric and the natural setting in which historic events occurred. Natural resources in historic zones are managed to maintain the general visual aspect of the historic period. Man-made fabric, including artifacts, must be protected and cared for by such means as will preserve original material and workmanship.

Our historic and cultural resources are not presently receiving adequate care. Therefore, the Service must:

Develop and implement a comprehensive long-range program for preservation of structures and artifacts.

Undertake interim, short-range stabilization measures to arrest further deterioration or loss.

Manage natural resources in historic zones as historic resources.

Natural Resources

The perpetuation of the full diversity of a natural environment or ecosystem, as compared to the protection of individual features or species, is and must remain a distinguishing aspect of the Service's management of natural lands. Policy and management emphasis must be toward perpetuation of these natural processes, assuring that impacts are not irreparable. Accordingly, the Service must:

Continue to perfect its expertise in ecosystem management, including programs relating to wildfire and prescribed burning techniques, wildlife ecology, necessary regulation and control of resource use and pollution control and abatement.

In accordance with a management plan, monitor critical resources for change, and modify management or other practices having adverse effects on natural processes.

Recreation Resources

The Service must be especially perceptive of and responsive to user attitudes and patterns associated with an increasingly urban population. While important natural and historic resources in and near urban settings must be the object of appropriate preservation, the Service must:

Intensively manage certain areas or portions of areas by landscape manipulation and rejuvenation to provide and assure the continuation of a quality experience.

Seek out and cooperate with other public and private agencies and institutions responsible for the provision of park, recreation, and leisure facilities and services.

Visitor Services

The National Park Service will perpetuate and actively cultivate the tradition of public service that has been its hallmark since 1916. Visitors will be welcomed, and information services will be designed to help visitors enjoy the parks. Individual preferences and expectations will be respected consistent with perpetuation of the resource, public safety, and the rights of other users. The National Park Service uniform will stand for courtesy, helpfulness, and accurate information as well as for visitor and resource protection. The same high standards are expected of all park, concessioner and other employees.

With adequately protected and maintained park resources as our primary concern, visitor services must emphasize:

Adequate visitor protection, including appreciation for climatic and physical hazards, thus reducing the need for excessive safety barriers and other precautions.

Information programs that reduce the need for law enforcement actions.

Development of nationwide and regional processes and activities to disseminate pre-visit information on the National Park System, including reservation requirements as necessary.

Concessions

Park concessions supplement those visitor services directly provided by the National Park Service. Through the use of concessions, the Service will permit only those commercial facilities and services within the parks which are necessary for the visitors' use and enjoyment of the park and consistent with the preservation of park resources. If adequate commercial facilities and services for park visitors exist or can be developed outside of park boundaries such facilities shall not be provided within the parks.

Consistent with this policy, management emphasis must provide for:

The conduct of concessioner matters in a responsible businesslike manner, including assignment of National Park Service representatives with appropriate education, training and experience to represent the Service and the public interest.

Monitoring of concessioner activities to assure that food, transportation, lodging and other services meet or surpass standards for operations.

Interpretation

The test of Servicewide interpretation activity shall be its capacity to enhance and not detract from the experience of park visitors. Imaginative and informed interpretation must give the visitor a perception and appreciation of park resources and the intangible values they represent; foster an environmental ethic cognizant of both the natural and man-made environment; and instill a recognition and acceptance of the conditions preservation imposes on use.

In content, interpretive activities must be faithful to fact and free of cultural and ethnic biases. The Service will be prepared to demonstrate the validity of all facts, interpretations and conclusions.

Through innovative approaches, interpretive programs, including personal contact and media, will be responsive to differing levels of visitor interest and inclination.

In this context, interpretive activities must emphasize:

Visitor contact approaching a face-to-face experience for all.

Curatorial maintenance of existing interpretive exhibits, including museum collections, and other interpretive facilities and materials.

Planning and development of interpretive facilities and devices which do not require intensive use of human or monetary resources for operation or maintenance.

Development of integrated park-related interpretive programs, including environmental education functions, visitor participation and other approaches.

Programs that incorporate an energy conservation message, both in content and by example.

Planning

Planning is a major Service responsibility at all levels. It is the means whereby we meet and affect the future. Since parks must be perpetuated for posterity, planning must assure that resource management, visitor use, and development are consistent with the fundamental purposes of the organic act and the specific legislation for each park.

The Service has revised its planning process to more effectively achieve park purposes.

This approach requires that:

Each park have a current, approved Statement for Management.

Planning be the minimum necessary to serve park needs.

Planning needs be clearly defined in priority order.

Public involvement be provided for prior to and during the decision stage.

All reasonable alternatives to achieve management objectives be considered, including long-range operational and maintenance needs associated with plan implementation.

Legislative compliance requirements be built directly into the planning process.

Parklands be classified for management purposes, first, according to inherent quality (i.e. historic and natural zones) and second, according to proposed use (i.e. development zones).

Complete support of this process throughout the Service will result in the production of plans that are timely, clearly needed, and can be implemented without costly delays.

Development and Restoration

Physical facilities shall be limited to those necessary to accomplish the management objectives for each park. These will be identified and defined through the planning process. The measure of acceptable development or restoration will be the extent to which it: Aids in the preservation and enjoyment of the resource, including guiding of visitor use; and provides environmentally acceptable access and in-park movement, including reasonable access for handicapped persons.

In the location and design of new facilities the Service will be guided by ecological conditions of the area and will incorporate design of a high aesthetic and functional character. Design, materials and facility equipment should consider and minimize long-term operation and maintenance costs.

The Service will dedicate itself to the use of environmentally sound and energy-efficient technology in the design of park facilities or systems.

The Service has unmet development and rehabilitation needs beyond its short-term capability. This requires that it carefully justify its budget requests to:

Emphasize the maintenance of existing physical facilities, including rehabilitation and reconstruction as necessary, in essentially developed and operational parks.

Provide new facilities primarily in recently authorized or essentially undeveloped parks, particularly those with high capability for meeting pressing recreation needs.

Develop an identifiable program for preservation of historic resources.

Perspective

All efforts to accomplish the mission of the National Park Service must be undertaken in the context of a nationwide mosaic of Federal, state and local parks, cultural and historic places and other recreational resources and activities extending beyond the National Park System. The management of each unit of the System must be guided by an understanding of its role in this mosaic.

Integrated and cooperative efforts at all levels of government are, therefore, necessary for maximum public benefit. Accordingly, the Service must:

Participate in state and regional recreation planning processes.

Identify and support those specific cooperative and assistance activities which have mutual benefits, contribute significantly to achieving the Service mission, and expand and improve other park and recreation systems.

Improve communications with and involvement of individuals and organizations concerned with and affected by park plans, developments and operations.

Through Service involvement in community and regional planning processes seek to achieve harmonious land use and development patterns.

In all programs and functions the Service must continue to provide a full opportunity for individual achievement and seek maximum economy and efficiency in management.