

PROGRAM STANDARDS

PARK PLANNING

Associate Director, Park Planning, Facilities, and Lands
National Park Service
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The *Park Planning Program Standards* represent the consensus of a project team that was formed in the spring of 2002 to consider the park planning interests and concerns being expressed by program and park managers and planning practitioners throughout the National Park Service. The project team members and the key steps in the revision process are outlined below.

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PREFACE

In May 1998 the National Park Service issued *Director's Order 2: Park Planning* under the new NPS directive system. An attachment to that order contained program standards for park¹ planning. DO-2 and the attached program standards revised and updated the guidance on planning contained in the 1988 NPS *Management Policies* and in *NPS-2: Planning Process Guideline*. The policies described in DO-2 were incorporated directly into the new 2001 NPS *Management Policies*. The program standards were intended to be subject to periodic review and update, as appropriate, under the authority of the associate director for park planning, facilities and lands.

The following *Park Planning Program Standards* update the standards that were approved in May 1998. The current update is a refinement rather than a major change to the 1998 direction. It reflects suggestions made by park managers, program managers, and planning practitioners, based on several years of experience with the previous standards. The standards convey the basic requirements for park planning and decision making. Additional recommendations, examples, and support materials are provided in the *Planners' Sourcebook*, which has also been revised and updated with new material. Together, the program standards and the planners' sourcebook provide comprehensive guidance for park planning to be used in conjunction with the 2001 NPS *Management Policies*. The standards presented here are considered to be fully consistent elaborations on the current park planning policies; therefore, no revisions or additions to those policies are proposed.

A notable issue addressed by this update to the *Park Planning Program Standards* is the need to incorporate enhanced guidance for natural and cultural resource management into general management plans. The updated standards address the concerns of resource managers by providing for area-specific prescriptions for resource management in general management plans.

Other refinements further strengthen analysis and public participation in park planning. The description of a *foundation for planning and management* as a step that can be completed prior to a general management plan is intended to establish what is most important about the park as a basis for focused data collection, analysis, and communications with stakeholders in advance of any planning or major management activity.

The revisions to the program standards are summarized below, along with a brief discussion of what each revision is intended to achieve.

¹ The term *park* is used in these standards to refer to all units of the national park system, including national parks, historical parks, monuments, historic sites, recreation areas, seashores, lakeshores, battlefields, cemeteries, memorials, heritage preservation areas, rivers, and other particular designations for units of the system.

Summary of Revisions to Park Planning Program Standards

What's Different	Why Change
PLANNING FRAMEWORK	
<p>Each park is encouraged to prepare a <i>foundation for park planning and management</i> that describes its purpose, significance, primary interpretive themes, and special mandates; briefly summarizes the servicewide legal and policy requirements applicable to all units of the national park system; and identifies and analyzes those resources and values, including opportunities for public enjoyment, determined to warrant primary consideration in park planning and management. (See also the more detailed discussion of what is different under the heading, "Foundation for Planning and Management," below.)</p> <p>This foundation may be developed as the first stage of general management planning or independently of a general management plan.</p> <p>This change does not add any new planning requirement. Rather, it offers parks the flexibility to develop this information as part of their GMPs, as they have in the past, or to develop it separately from a GMP. Most parks already have statements of purpose and significance developed as part of their general management planning or strategic planning. Most parks also have, or are working to develop, the knowledge of their major resources and values needed to meet the standards for foundation statements.</p> <p><i>Program plans</i> (comprehensive interpretive plans, resource stewardship plans, asset management plans, land protection plans, wilderness management plans, collections management plans, etc.) tier off GMPs and are preliminary to strategic plans in the planning framework. Recommendations from program managers inform the strategic planning process, but decisions about park priorities are still made on a parkwide basis through strategic planning.</p> <p>This change clarifies the appropriate role of program management plans in the planning framework. It does not add any new planning requirement. Previously program plans were described as one kind of implementation planning.</p>	<p>To provide an opportunity, either concurrently with or separately from the GMP, for parks to discuss and document those foundation items that remain constant for all kinds of subsequent planning, management, and associated consultations with partners— particularly valuable if a park does not have a current GMP.</p> <p>To support a process whereby parks may engage staff, scholars, experts, and partners in development or consolidation of information needed to support subsequent planning and management.</p>
<p><i>Program plans</i> (comprehensive interpretive plans, resource stewardship plans, asset management plans, land protection plans, wilderness management plans, collections management plans, etc.) tier off GMPs and are preliminary to strategic plans in the planning framework. Recommendations from program managers inform the strategic planning process, but decisions about park priorities are still made on a parkwide basis through strategic planning.</p>	<p>To provide a clearer link between the qualitative desired conditions prescribed in GMPs and the measurable goals and implementing actions identified in park strategic plans and implementation plans. The linkages include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more specific and detailed scientific, scholarly, and technical analyses by program managers regarding discrepancies between existing and desired conditions • recommendations by program managers of the actions needed to move from existing to desired conditions

Summary of Revisions to Park Planning Program Standards

What's Different	Why Change
<p>Program standards for the various kinds of program management plans and implementation plans (developed by the responsible program offices) are included by reference in the <i>Park Planning Program Standards</i>.</p>	<p>To make the park planning standards comprehensive and inclusive of all park planning, while still providing for the responsible WASO program managers to develop and maintain their planning guidance.</p>
<p>The <i>Park Planning Program Standards</i> are reformatted around plans instead of planning elements.</p>	<p>To help people understand the role each plan plays in the framework of planning and decision making and why the various plans have different content and process requirements.</p>
<p>FOUNDATION FOR PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT</p>	
<p><i>Primary interpretive themes</i> are included in the foundation for planning and management.</p>	<p>To elaborate on the primary stories and experiences that are fundamental to the public understanding of the park's purpose and significance, providing the foundation for comprehensive interpretive planning.</p>
<p>A brief summary of <i>servicewide legal and policy requirements</i> is included in the foundation for park planning and management.</p>	<p>To balance the focus on fundamental and other important resources and values with the recognition that all park resources and opportunities for visitor enjoyment must be managed in compliance with a large body of legal and policy requirements intended to adequately protect the nation's natural and cultural heritage and opportunities for enjoyment of that heritage.</p>
<p>As part of their foundation for planning and management, park staffs identify and analyze <i>fundamental resources and values</i> (those particular features, systems, processes, experiences, scenes, sounds, smells, etc., that are key to achieving the park's purpose and maintaining its significance), along with any <i>other important resources and values</i> that are integral to planning and management. This analysis includes a description of the <i>optimum condition</i> for each resource or value, consistent with the <i>NPS Management Policies</i>. Based on this analysis the foundation statement then summarizes the <i>policy-level issues</i> (the potential for some resources or values to be detrimentally affected by discretionary management decisions intended to achieve conditions consistent with the park's purpose). General management</p>	<p>To provide the information needed to understand those things that are most important about the park so that they are adequately considered during all planning and management.</p>

Summary of Revisions to Park Planning Program Standards

What's Different	Why Change
<p>planning is identified as the appropriate forum for resolving those issues.</p>	
<p><i>Optimum condition</i> is a new term for a concept that in previous plans may have been called <i>park goals</i> or <i>parkwide desired future conditions</i>. The intent is to interpret NPS policy into more specific statements of optimum conditions for the park's fundamental and other important resources and values.</p>	
GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLANS	
<p>The prerequisites for general management planning are clearly defined and include (1) adequate data about the park's fundamental and other important resources and values, including areas potentially suitable for wilderness or wild and scenic river designation, (2) consultations with federal, tribal, state, and local government agencies to identify the range of potential planning issues and to ensure active engagement in the plan.</p>	<p>To ensure that the park staff is ready to engage in the development of a new GMP that adequately considers and addresses those things that are most important about the park, and to minimize surprises that could greatly increase the level of controversy and the cost of planning.</p>
<p>This prerequisite information would be critical to any major decision about the park, even if it was not required by the planning standards.</p>	
<p>GMP project agreements require strategies for partner and public involvement.</p>	<p>To ensure that planning is as well informed as possible, with no important contacts overlooked.</p>
<p>GMPs are structured around discussions of the park's fundamental and other important resources and values, and they more thoroughly document the analysis of those resources and values. Analysis includes the current state of knowledge; ecological, cultural, and social contexts; optimum conditions based on NPS policy; current conditions, trends and major influences; and stakeholder interests.</p>	<p>To ensure that stewardship of the park's fundamental resources and values is the basis for all GMP-level decision making, and to ensure that all stakeholders understand the direction derived from law and policy regarding these resources and values prior to decision making.</p>
<p>GMPs contain area-specific management prescriptions that describe the resource conditions and visitor experience opportunities to be achieved in each distinctive area of the park, focused on the fundamental and other important resources and values occurring in each area, along with the kinds and levels of management, access, and development</p>	<p>To provide better long-term guidance for park managers and staff, particularly regarding natural and cultural resource management and opportunities for visitor enjoyment of resources.</p> <p>Under previous guidance GMPs stopped at a level of detail for management prescriptions that would allow</p>

Summary of Revisions to Park Planning Program Standards

What's Different	Why Change
appropriate to maintaining those conditions and experiences.	the prescription to be overlaid over a number of resource types. Therefore, it was not possible to specify a condition for a particular biological, hydrological, geological, historic, or prehistoric feature, system, or process, or a particular resource-related experience opportunity. Under the new guidance, management prescriptions are described in greater detail after deciding how particular areas within the park will be zoned, allowing more meaningful, and presumably more useful, descriptions of desired conditions and opportunities.
Additional guidance is provided in the planners' sourcebook regarding the required elements of a final general management plan and a draft and final environmental impact statement.	To eliminate the confusion caused by trying to apply the DO-12 guidance, which is written primarily for implementation plans, to general management plans, and to provide better guidance for analyzing the impacts of management prescriptions.
General estimates of annual recurring, one-time capital, and life-cycle costs are presented in all GMPs. Guidance is provided for ensuring consistency from plan to plan in the kind of cost estimates included.	To focus stakeholders on a comparison of the relative overall costs of implementing different alternatives for the park, without including individual cost estimates for particular facilities or programs. To avoid specific facility cost estimates in GMPs that end up being improperly used to support budget requests. To be responsive to NPS and congressional requests to provide life-cycle costs in GMPs.
A final GMP is prepared after the final EIS has been reviewed and the record of decision has been signed.	To provide a management and communication tool for the park staff that clearly and succinctly describes the desired conditions for the park.

OVERVIEW OF PARK PLANNING AND DECISION MAKING

Relationships between Law, Policy, and Planning

The management of the national park system is directed by federal law, NPS policy, and park planning, in that order.

Park staffs plan for one reason: to ensure that the decisions made for each park achieve the park's purpose as cost-effectively and consistently as possible. Each park's purpose is defined in part by the fundamental purpose of the National Park Service, which is to conserve park resources and values and to provide for their enjoyment in ways that leave them unimpaired, and in part by more specific direction included in each park's individual authorizing legislation or presidential proclamation. The fact that each park has a particular mandated purpose distinguishes the units of the national park system from federal lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, whose purposes are usually defined in full by the fundamental purposes of the managing agency.

In most cases the range of potential management and use for units of the national park system is more constrained by law and policy than what might be considered in planning for multiple use of a national forest or a BLM-managed resource area, where consumptive uses, including timber harvest and mineral development, are part of the agency mission. However, because each park has a particular purpose, the NPS *Management Policies* allow for considerable management discretion in determining the best course of management for each park, based on its purpose and significance, the interrelationships that exist among the park's resources and values, the range of stakeholder interests, knowledge of best practices, and other factors.

Planning is a decision-making process. It helps managers determine the best way to comply with law and policy in those instances where management discretion is allowed, and the best way to deal with the many competing interests in parks that are not directly addressed by law or policy.

Park managers must constantly make difficult decisions about the best ways to preserve park resources and values for public enjoyment. They must address competing demands for limited resources, priorities for limited funds and staff, and differing local and nationwide interests and views of what is most important about a park.

Are there parts of the battlefield at Gettysburg where rehabilitation would be preferable to preservation? To what extent should the natural values of the landscape be enhanced?

What are the highest priority actions for restoring natural ecosystem functioning in Everglades National Park?

How can traffic congestion be reduced at Zion National Park? Should visitors be encouraged or required to use a public transportation system? How can transportation alternatives enhance visitor experience opportunities?

What role should the National Park Service play in partnership with the local community to preserve and interpret the history of New Bedford Whaling?

What are the desired resource conditions and associated opportunities for visitor experiences at Saguaro National Park, where a 50 percent increase in use over the past 10 years is causing resource damage and significant conflicts among visitors seeking different types of experiences?

Such decisions often involve issues of perceived conflicts

- among resources or values (enhancement of ecological diversity vs. a specific species or community, enhancement of historic properties dating from one historic period vs. another, enhancement of ecological functioning vs. preservation of a historic scene)
- between protection of resources or providing opportunities for enjoyment
- between different kinds of visitor experiences (degree of self-reliance vs. amenities, solitude and privacy vs. social interaction, degree of interpretive programming vs. self-discovery)

Planning provides methods and tools for resolving these issues in ways that promote mutually beneficial solutions – solutions that articulate how natural and cultural values interrelate in healthy ecosystems/cultural landscapes and how public enjoyment of these places can be part of a strategy for ensuring that resources are protected unimpaired for future generations.

The National Park Service is subject to a number of legal requirements for planning, all intended to support the best possible decision making for the agency and the public it serves. The National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978 (16 USC 1a-7(b)) requires the National Park Service to conduct comprehensive general planning. The 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA, 42 USC 55) and sections 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA, 16 USC 470) require all federal agencies to base decisions on adequate analysis in consultation with the public. The 1993 Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA, 31 USC 1101) requires all federal agencies to track progress made toward goals. Together these processes make the National Park Service more effective, more collaborative, and more accountable.

Guiding Principles of Park Planning

The National Park Service uses planning to bring a logical framework, analysis based on current scholarship and science, public involvement, and accountability into decision making.

Logical Framework

The National Park Service takes a comprehensive approach to decision making about parks that integrates the management of natural and cultural resources, visitor enjoyment and other uses, and associated management activities and development over relatively long periods of time (typically 15 to 20 years). This decision making takes place within a dynamic, continuously changing environment. Because this working environment is not static – or even highly predictable – the success of park management depends largely upon the capabilities of park managers and staffs to continuously process new information and use it creatively, often in partnership with others, to resolve complex and changing issues.

To support managers and staffs in this decision making, a *framework of park planning and decision making* has been devised to balance continuity and adaptability in a dynamic decision-making process. Within this framework, which extends from broad visions shared with the public to annual work assignments and evaluations, a logical, trackable rationale for decision making is created by first establishing why a park was created and what conditions should exist there, then focusing with increasing specificity on how to achieve the various conditions over a period of time. The desired conditions provide agreed-upon, consistent goals that allow management teams to adapt their actions to changing situations while staying focused on what is most important about the park. Management teams continuously assess their progress and adjust their activities as necessary through a process called *adaptive management* (addressed in greater detail under the principle of accountability, below).

In reality, parks do not always have all the components of the described planning framework in place and must work within funding and staffing constraints in trying to work within this framework. See the discussions of “Standard Sequence” and “Interim Management without a Current General Management Plan,” pages 7 and 8.

Analysis

The planning process ensures that decisions are based on current scientific, scholarly, and technical information about the park’s resources and values and about the potential environmental impacts of alternative courses of action.

Analysis becomes increasingly more specific through a series of planning processes that start with the park’s foundation for planning and management and extend through general management planning, program planning, and implementation planning. At key points of planning and decision making, interdisciplinary teams identify reasonable alternatives and analyze and compare their relative benefits, costs, and environmental impacts, which may extend beyond park boundaries.

Analysis is focused first on the park as a whole, identifying and analyzing the park’s fundamental and other important park resources and values in their parkwide, regional, national, and if appropriate, global contexts. This level of analysis helps park managers and staffs understand what is most important about the park and provides the information needed to manage the park in collaboration with others as an integral part of a larger ecosystem, historic setting, and integrated system of national, tribal, state, and local parklands. Decisions made within this larger context are more likely to be broadly supported and successful over time. Additional analysis of environmental (natural, cultural, and socioeconomic) impacts and costs becomes progressively more site-specific and detailed as planning and decision making advance from broad direction to specific activities.

Partner and Public Involvement

As sites with great symbolic value to the American public, national parks are often the focus of intense public interest. Understanding the many values that federal, tribal, state, and local governments, existing and potential visitors, park neighbors, people with traditional cultural ties to park lands, scientists and scholars, concessioners, cooperating associations, and the

general public place on park resources and experiences is often the key to reaching good decisions that can be implemented.

Partner and public participation in planning and decision making is intended to ensure that the National Park Service fully understands and considers the knowledge and interests that all stakeholders can share about parks as part of their jurisdictional or professional responsibilities, national heritage, cultural traditions, or community surroundings. Consultations with stakeholders also provide opportunities for NPS officials to share information about the park’s purpose and significance and the opportunities and constraints related to park management.

The standards for public involvement in park planning included in this document are supplemental to policies and standards included in the Director’s Order on Civic Engagement and Public Involvement (DO-75A), which apply to all aspects of park planning and management.

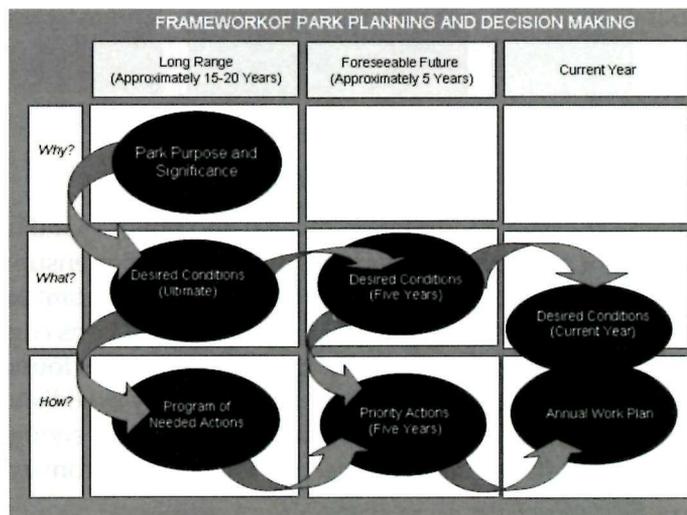
Accountability

Park superintendents are accountable for identifying and accomplishing strategic and annual goals as incremental steps toward fully carrying out the park mission. Planning is a critical and essential part of the NPS performance management system, which is designed to improve the agency’s performance and results. This system relies on the process of adaptive management, through which the results of particular management actions are compared to the desired conditions, and actions are revised as necessary to achieve the desired results. As part of adaptive management, planning helps ensure and document that managers are accountable to the public for their decisions and that those decisions are promoting the effective use of public funds.

The ultimate outcome of planning for national parks is results – resource conditions and visitor experiences that help achieve the park’s purpose and maintain its significance in a cost-effective manner.

Framework of Park Planning and Decision Making

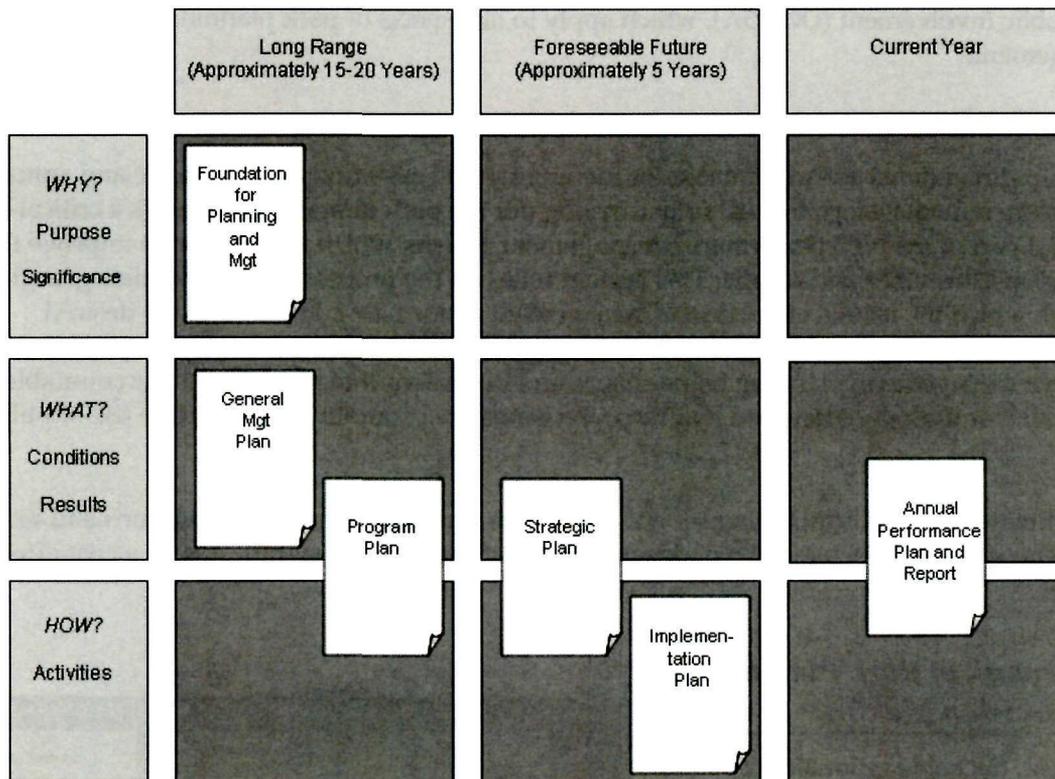
A logical, trackable rationale for decisions is created through several levels of planning that become increasingly detailed and complementary by agreeing first on *why* the park was established and *what* resource conditions and visitor experiences should exist there, and then by becoming increasingly focused on *how* those conditions should be achieved. This why/what/how logic helps park managers and staffs stay focused on



the park’s purpose and desired conditions when making decisions about specific management activities or projects. Planning and decision making also become more detailed through time, by first determining what conditions the park hopes ultimately to achieve, then what portion might be achieved within the next five years, and finally what portion should be achieved in the current year. This long-range/mid-range/short-range planning helps park managers and staffs plot and achieve incremental progress toward their ultimate goals.

Within this framework, planning and decision making are accomplished through six discrete kinds of planning, resulting in six kinds of documents, summarized below.

Planning Documents Related to the Framework of Planning and Decision Making



Foundation for Planning and Management

Defining the park’s foundation of legal and policy mandates is the prerequisite for all subsequent planning and decision making. It helps ensure that all stakeholders, including NPS managers and staff, understand what is most important about the park, and it provides the parameters for ensuring that all programs and actions contribute to achieving the park’s purpose and other mandates. To this end, the park’s foundation for planning and management documents the congressionally or presidentially established purpose of each park, the reasons why the park’s resources and values are significant enough to warrant national park designation, the primary interpretive themes to be conveyed to visitors, any special mandates

Congress may have placed on that particular park, and the more general mandates contained in the large body of laws and policies that apply to all units of the national park system.

The park's foundation statement additionally identifies and analyzes a set of resources and values (features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, etc.) determined to warrant primary consideration during park planning and management. This analysis includes an interpretation of the optimum condition for each resource or value, based on NPS *Management Policies*, and a comparison to the existing condition. Based on this analysis the foundation statement summarizes the *policy*-level issues (the potential for some resources or values to be detrimentally affected by discretionary management decisions intended to achieve conditions consistent with the park's purpose). General management planning is the appropriate forum for resolving those issues.

General Management Plan

General management planning results in a shared understanding among NPS managers and the public about the kinds of resource conditions and visitor experiences that will best fulfill the purpose of the park. General management plans zone the park for some variety of resource conditions and experiences (consistent with the discretion allowed under the NPS *Management Policies*) based on the intrinsic qualities of particular locations and considering the range of stakeholder interests and concerns. The plan looks at the park as a whole and as a part of larger ecological, cultural, and socioeconomic systems. This comprehensive approach helps ensure that the decisions made through general management planning are widely supported and sustainable over time.

General management plans direct park managers to focus on achieving the conditions and experiences prescribed by the plan, but they do not provide direction for specific actions, recognizing that managers may have to continuously adapt their approaches to current situations based on changing information or conditions, including changing staffing, budgeting, and scheduling opportunities and constraints.

Park Program Plans

Park managers and staffs conduct various kinds of program planning to identify and recommend the best strategies for achieving the desired conditions and/or visitor experiences related to each particular program area (resource management, visitor use, facility management, etc.). Program planning serves as a bridge between the qualitative statements of desired conditions established in the general management plan and the measurable goals and implementing actions identified in park strategic plans and implementation plans. Park-level program plans are not decision-making documents. They are analytical documents, or compilations of information, that identify and track indicators of desired conditions, then periodically update recommendations about the comprehensive program of activities needed to achieve and maintain those conditions.

Park Strategic Plan

Park strategic plans ideally tier off the park's general management plan and program management plans, making decisions about which of the desired conditions identified in those

plans should be the highest park priorities in the foreseeable future (usually about the next three to five years). In making these decisions, the strategic plans look for the best fit between park priorities, based on current local conditions (threats to resources, opportunities for collaboration, etc.), and the NPS servicewide priorities, established as part of the Department of the Interior's strategic planning.

As part of their strategic planning, park managers and staffs also consider the recommendations (developed as part of program planning) about specific programs of action needed to achieve the desired conditions for the park's various natural resources, cultural resources, and visitor experiences, and they prioritize and integrate those recommendations into a single strategy to guide parkwide budget allocations and work planning over the next three to five years.

Implementation Plans

Implementation plans tier off the park's general management plan, program plans, and strategic plan and describe in detail the high-priority actions that will be taken over the next several years to help achieve the desired conditions for the park. They generally include schedules and cost estimates needed for budgeting and work loading. The National Park Service prepares a great variety of implementation plans, whose contents vary widely, depending upon the kind of project (facility design and construction, exotic species removal, rehabilitation of a historic structure, implementation of public transit, treatment of historic manuscripts, media design and implementation, boat allotments among various user groups, reintroduction of an extirpated species, etc.).

Annual Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report

Annual performance plans articulate the park's annual goals for the fiscal year. They also include an annual work plan that identifies the specific park activities needed to achieve the annual goals, with budget and workload details. Annual performance reports document the progress made toward meeting the last fiscal year's annual performance goals and analyze the causes of unmet goals, if any. Based on this information, the park staff considers the possible need for additional or revised planning to bring goals and results closer together.

Integration of Planning and Decision-Making Processes

Standard Sequence

All park plans should build on and incorporate (at least by reference) the park's foundation for planning and management. From that statement, park planning logically flows from broad-scale general management planning through progressively more specific program planning, strategic planning, implementation planning, and annual planning. The results of all this planning and decision making are monitored by the park staff, and information is fed back into the process at appropriate junctures. If the goals included in the park's annual performance plan and five-year strategic plan are not being met (and therefore incremental progress is not being made toward achieving the conditions described in the foundation statement and the general management plan), then management teams must seek to understand why and to identify appropriate actions for moving closer to those goals. Occasionally the broad direction

provided by foundation statements and general management plans must be reassessed to reflect new knowledge or previously unforeseen circumstances, then the cycle resumes.

In this continuing cycle of planning and decision making, it is important to distinguish which issues can most appropriately be addressed by general management planning and which will most appropriately be addressed by more detailed planning.

To ensure servicewide quality and coordination, program standards have been (or will be) established for each plan to ensure that it adequately addresses the elements needed to support this continuous, integrated cycle of planning and decision making. The program standards are wholly consistent with the content and process requirements for each kind of plan that may be directed by Congress, such as the congressional requirements for general management planning, strategic planning, annual performance planning, and some kinds of implementation planning. So long as each plan adequately addresses the elements assigned to it within the framework, and so long as each plan respects and builds upon the prerequisite elements assigned to other plans, park planning and decision making can proceed in a logical, trackable manner, avoiding duplication of effort, wasted time on low-priority issues, or potentially conflicting conclusions.

Interim Management without a Current General Management Plan

Parks may lack a current general management plan but still need to proceed with program planning or strategic planning. In those cases, the foundation for planning and management provides general guidance about what is most important about the park. (See the more detailed discussion of this general guidance beginning on page 11.) A park should have a foundation for planning and management before any subsequent planning and decision making.

Certain kinds of decisions must tier off and be consistent with a current general management plan. These include decisions about major new development, major modes of transportation, and other major commitments of park land or resources. Even if such decisions were based on analysis and made in consultation with the public, without a current general management plan they would be highly at risk for solving one problem but creating another. For example, a decision to develop a transit system without the context of a current general management plan might solve a problem of automobile congestion but not give adequate consideration to how the new transit system might affect resource conditions and visitor experiences throughout the park and possibly the region—and whether those changes would be desirable.

Concurrent Implementation Planning

Implementation planning for one or more projects may be conducted concurrently with general management planning, program planning, and/or strategic planning. Unless otherwise directed by Congress, implementation planning should not be conducted until the facility or program is expected to be implemented within the next two to five years (the timeframe within which the analysis is expected to remain current). Such projects are presumably based on adequate analysis by the responsible program manager(s) to determine their appropriateness (usually accomplished through program planning) and their high priority for the park as a whole (usually established through strategic planning). When an implementation plan is

conducted concurrently with a general management plan, the record of decision for the general management plan should be signed before the implementation plan is approved.

Summary: Major Decision Elements of Park Plans

The specific elements of each plan intended to guide decision making in parks are summarized below. These elements are intended to build on one another, providing increasingly specific guidance about what needs to be done in the park, and why.

Major Decision Elements of Park Plans

Plan	Element	Brief Definition
<i>Foundation for Planning and Management</i>		
<i>Part One: Legal Requirements</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose • Significance • Primary interpretive themes • Special mandates • Summary of servicewide legal and policy requirements 	<p>The specific reason(s) for establishing a particular park</p> <p>Statements of why, within a national, regional, and systemwide context, the park's resources and values are important enough to warrant national park designation</p> <p>The most important ideas or concepts to be communicated to the public about a park</p> <p>Legal mandates specific to the park that expand upon or contradict a park's legislated purpose</p> <p>Brief overview of the large body of federal laws, policies, and regulations governing all units of the national park system</p>
<i>Part Two: Analysis of Resources and Values</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of fundamental resources and values • Analysis of other important resources and values • Policy-level issues 	<p>Analysis, including current state of knowledge and optimum conditions based on NPS management policies, of those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other resources and values determined to warrant primary consideration during planning and management because they are critical to achieving the park's purpose and maintaining its significance</p> <p>Analysis, including current state of knowledge and optimum conditions based on NPS management policies, of those other resources and values that are determined to be important to park management and planning, although they are not related to the park's purpose and significance</p> <p>Analysis of the potential for some resources or values to be detrimentally affected by discretionary management decisions intended to achieve conditions consistent with the park's purpose</p>

Major Decision Elements of Park Plans

Plan	Element	Brief Definition
<i>General Management Plan</i>	• All elements from the foundation for planning and management (repeat, if this document has been developed independently of the GMP)	See above.
	• Management concept	A brief, inspirational statement of the kind of place the park should be (a "vision" statement)
	• Management zoning	The application of various management overlays (integrated sets of resource conditions and associated visitor experiences) to various geographic areas throughout the park, intended to resolve policy-level issues and to provide for some variety of compatible resource conditions and visitor experiences
	• Area-specific management prescriptions	Area-specific guidance about the desired resource conditions, visitor experience opportunities, and appropriate kinds and levels of management, development, and access (modes of transportation) for each particular area of the park, based on how it is zoned; also the kinds of changes needed to move from the existing to the desired conditions
	• Potential boundary modifications (if appropriate)	The description of areas or resources that meet criteria for boundary adjustments, along with the rationale for an adjustment
	• Projected implementation costs	A projection of the probable range of recurring annual costs, initial one-time costs, and life-cycle costs of plan implementation
<i>Program Plan</i>	• Indicators of desired conditions	The <i>quantifiable or otherwise objective (based on observation or communication)</i> indicators and targets established by program managers to monitor the attainment of desired resource conditions or visitor experiences
	• Recommended comprehensive strategies	Recommendations about specific actions needed to achieve or maintain desired resource conditions and visitor experiences
<i>Park Strategic Plan</i>	• Long-term goals	Statements of what the park intends to achieve over approximately the next five years, expressed as measurable desired conditions
	• Parkwide strategy	General plan of action for the next three to five years, needed to achieve the five-year goals
<i>Implementation Plan</i>	• Details of specific projects or programs	The guidance needed to implement a specific project or program, usually including schedules and cost estimates
<i>Annual Performance Plan</i>	• Annual goals	The measurable goals the park staff plans to achieve over the next year
	• Annual work plan	A comprehensive plan for allocating budget and FTEs to accomplish the highest priority work for the next year
<i>Annual Performance Report</i>	• Achieved results	Actual resource conditions or visitor experiences, determined through monitoring or communication with visitors

THE PARK'S FOUNDATION FOR PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of the foundation statement is to clearly define the legal and policy requirements that mandate the park's basic management responsibilities, and to describe the resources and values that are fundamental to achieving the park's purpose or are otherwise important to park planning and management. While all units of the national park system must be managed in compliance with a large body of federal laws and policies intended to protect a great variety of natural and cultural resources and opportunities for public enjoyment, each park has its own specific purpose, established by Congress, which provides the context for park management. The foundation statement ensures a shared understanding of that purpose, the resources and values that are fundamental to achieving that purpose, and the other resources and values that are also important to consider in park planning and management.

This foundation may be developed as phase one of the park's general management plan or as a separate statement. (See also the more detailed discussion of process standards on page 15). The flexibility to develop foundation statements independently of the general management plan is intended to ensure that all parks have at least this basic level of guidance even if they do not have a current general management plan. Also, some separation between the foundation for planning and management and the preparation of a general management plan may be desirable to provide sufficient time for the collection, analyses, synthesis, and interpretation of information needed for general management planning or other major program planning.

The foundation statement helps a park understand and plan the inventories, studies, research, evaluations, and analyses needed to provide adequate knowledge of the park's resources and visitors to successfully undertake major planning and management efforts. Identifying and analyzing fundamental resources and values and any other resources and values that are important to consider in park planning and management provides the basis for ensuring that those things are adequately considered and protected during all subsequent planning and management. It also helps decision makers set priorities and make difficult choices when budgets and staffs are insufficient to accomplish everything that needs to be done. As planning and decision making move from the conceptual to the specific, decisions can be continuously tested against the criteria of protecting what is most important about the park.

The park's foundation for planning and management provides the information needed to discuss the park's role and the responsibilities of park managers in relation to the roles and responsibilities of other jurisdictions within the region, including other federal, tribal, state, and local governmental land managers and regulatory and planning authorities. The national parks are integral parts of broad ecosystems, cultural systems/landscapes, and a network of parks and open spaces where people can enjoy their natural and cultural heritage. Decisions that consider the parks in these contexts are more likely to be broadly understood and honored over time.

The park's foundation for planning and management also assists in determining whether any proposed action might violate the mandate of the NPS Organic Act "to conserve the scenery

and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” The 2001 NPS *Management Policies* state that an impact would be more likely to constitute impairment if it affects a resource or value “necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of the park” or “key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park.” The identification of fundamental resources and values—which include opportunities for visitors to experience the park’s significant resources and values—helps define what is key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park and to opportunities for enjoyment.

Major Elements

The park’s foundation for planning and management is a two-part document. Part one describes the park’s *purpose, significance, primary interpretive themes, and special mandates*. These elements are closely related, and most of them are iterative, significance being derived from purpose, and primary interpretive themes being derived from purpose and significance. Special mandates are legal requirements that must be fulfilled along with the park’s purpose, even if they do not relate to that purpose (a requirement to allow for the continuation of a traditional use, such as hunting, is an example).

Part one also includes a brief overview of the large body of *servicewide legal and policy requirements* that apply equally to all units of the national park system, recognizing that although each park has a particular purpose, all parks must be managed in full compliance with these federal mandates governing numerous aspects of environmental quality, protection of historic properties on federal land, public use, and agency administration.

Part two of the park’s foundation for planning and management identifies and analyzes two categories of resources and values: the *fundamental resources and values* determined to warrant primary consideration during planning and management because they are critical to achieving the park’s purpose and maintaining its significance, and those *other important resources or values* determined to be integral to park planning and management, even if they are not related to the park’s purpose. For each resource or value, the following information is documented to guide planning and management: (1) a summary assessment of the quality and comprehensiveness of the existing information about the resource or value, (2) the importance of the resource or value in its full ecological, cultural, and/or social context, (3) the optimum condition based on the NPS management policies, (4) the current condition, the trend if that condition is changing, and the major influences affecting the trend, and (5) the range of known stakeholder interests in the resource or value.

A summary assessment of the quality and comprehensiveness of existing information about park resources (e.g. archeological resources, ethnographic resources, cultural landscapes, historic structures, wetlands, floodplains, species inventories, and threatened or endangered species, as appropriate) and visitor use patterns and trends provides a basis for the subsequent identification of resource and visitor information necessary to provide an adequate knowledge base for planning and management, and to plan for its acquisition.

Once adequate information is available to analyze optimum and current conditions, this analysis assists in identifying whether or not the park has any *policy-level issues* that will require management discretion to resolve. The NPS *Management Policies* recognize that managers sometimes have to make decisions designed to achieve conditions consistent with the park’s purpose that may be detrimental to other resources or values. General management planning is the appropriate process for making those discretionary management decisions consistent with law and policy, and for documenting the rationale leading up to those decisions.

Until desired conditions have been established in a general management plan, the optimum conditions based on management policies can provide general guidance for decision making and help frame the issues that need to be resolved. Consistent with management policies, managers may take actions they consider necessary to protect park resources and values, so long as those actions do not preclude reasonable alternatives, which should be considered as soon as possible through general management planning. (See also the discussion of actions that must tier off and be consistent with a current general management plan, page 8.)

Standards for Elements To Be Included in the Park’s Foundation for Planning and Management

Element	Brief Definition	Standards
Part 1: Legal Requirements		
Park purpose	The specific reason(s) for establishing a particular park	<p>Statements of the park’s purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are grounded in a thorough analysis of the park’s legislation (or executive order) and legislative history, including studies prior to authorization • go beyond a restatement of the law to document shared assumptions about what the law means in terms specific to the park • may be changed only by Congress (although the assumptions about how best to interpret the park’s establishing legislation and legislative history may be updated as part of the park’s foundation statement or general management plan)
Park significance	Statements of why, within a national, regional, and systemwide context, the park’s resources and values are important enough to warrant national park designation	<p>Statements of the park’s significance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context • are directly linked to the purpose of the park • are substantiated by data or consensus • reflect the most current scientific or scholarly inquiry and cultural perceptions, which may have changed since the park’s establishment

Standards for Elements To Be Included in the Park's Foundation for Planning and Management

Element	Brief Definition	Standards
Primary interpretive themes	The most important ideas or concepts to be communicated to the public about a park	<p>Primary interpretive themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are based upon park purpose and significance • connect park resources to relevant ideas, meanings, concepts, contexts, beliefs, and values • support the desired interpretive outcome of increasing visitor understanding and appreciation of the significances of the park's resources
Special mandates	Legal mandates specific to the park that expand upon or contradict a park's legislated purpose	<p>Special mandates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are specific to the park, but are additional to those directly related to park purpose • are not an inventory of all the laws applicable to the national park system • identify any potential conflict with the park's purpose and significance
Summary of Servicewide Legal and Policy Requirements	Brief overview of the large body of federal laws, policies, and regulations governing all units of the national park system	<p>The summary of servicewide legal and policy requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognizes the body of federal laws, policies, and regulations that apply to all parks • may address the requirements of individual laws or policies related to natural resources, cultural resources, visitor use, facility development, or park operations if they are particularly relevant to issues of concern at the park

Part 2: Analysis of Resources and Values

Analysis of fundamental resources and values	Analysis, including current state of knowledge and optimum conditions based on NPS management policies, of those resources and values determined to warrant primary consideration during planning and management because they are critical to achieving the park's purpose and maintaining its significance	<p>Fundamental resources and values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • warrant primary consideration during planning and management because they are critical to achieving the park's purpose and maintaining its significance • may include systems, processes, features, visitor experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells or other resources and values • are identified by an interdisciplinary team in consultation with recognized experts and other agencies that share jurisdiction • are analyzed in terms of status of existing information; national/regional context; optimum conditions based on NPS policies; current conditions, trends, and factors affecting the trends; and range of stakeholder interests and concerns
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Standards for Elements To Be Included in the Park’s Foundation for Planning and Management

Element	Brief Definition	Standards
Analysis of other important resources and values	Analysis, including current state of knowledge and optimum conditions based on NPS management policies of those other resources and values that are determined to be important to park planning and management , although they are not related to the park’s purpose and significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are not constrained, in describing optimum conditions, by considerations of foreseeable fiscal or technical feasibility (which may change in a relatively short time) <p>Other important resources and values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • include those resources and values that are determined to be important in their own right even though they are not related to the park’s purpose and significance • are identified by an interdisciplinary team in consultation with recognized experts and other agencies that share jurisdiction • are analyzed in terms of status of existing information; national/regional context; optimum conditions based on NPS policies; current conditions, trends, and factors affecting the trends; and range of stakeholder interests and concerns • are not constrained, in describing optimum conditions, by considerations of foreseeable fiscal or technical feasibility (which may change in a relatively short time)
Policy-level issues	Analysis of the potential for some resources or values to be detrimentally affected by discretionary management decisions designed to achieve conditions consistent with the park’s purpose	<p>Policy-level issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify where management discretion is required to resolve potentially incompatible conditions associated with the optimum management of the park’s fundamental or other important resources and values • interpret servicewide laws and policies as they apply to the park’s resources and values, considering their interrelationships and conditions • are based on a scientific/scholarly analysis of context, conditions, trends, and factors affecting those trends, and the range of stakeholder interests and concerns

Process Standards

Partner and Public Involvement

The park’s foundation for planning and management is developed by NPS interdisciplinary teams.

Public and partner involvement should include, at a minimum, recognized experts knowledgeable about the park’s resources and values, traditionally associated groups with

strong cultural ties to the park's resources and values, and any federal, tribal, state, or local agencies with jurisdiction (either inside or adjacent to the park) over the park's fundamental or otherwise important resources and values.

Broader participation by park visitors, park neighbors, and other interest groups in developing the park's foundation for planning and management may be important if the foundation statement is developed separately from the general management plan (which always receives broad public review). The scope of public involvement for a foundation statement developed independently of a general management plan is left to the discretion of the park manager.

The foundation for planning and management does not result in federal actions and does not require compliance with NEPA or other federal legislation addressed through NEPA compliance, including the NHPA. However, because of the importance of the park's foundation for planning and management, special attention should be given to ensuring that all the appropriate interests are represented and that everyone understands how the park's foundation statement will direct subsequent decision making.

Integration of Park Information

In identifying and analyzing the park's fundamental and other important resources and values, the park staff should consult all the park's relevant information bases, including the inventory and monitoring programs, which identify and track the conditions of key resources, and the asset priority index, which identifies the park's most important physical assets, including cultural properties. As conclusions are drawn about what is most important about the park, the park's resource and facility management systems should be updated to ensure consistency among the various planning and management tools.

Review and Approval

WASO policy-level consultation is required when this document is prepared separately from a general management plan. The park's foundation for planning and management is approved by the park superintendent and the regional director.

Updates and Revisions

Once approved, these statements are expected to remain constant over a long period of time. However, the various elements of the foundation statement may need to be updated under certain circumstances:

Only Congress (or the president, in the case of an executive order) may change the purpose of establishing a park. However, shared assumptions about how best to interpret the park's establishing legislation and legislative history may be updated as part of the park's foundation statement or general management plan. It is appropriate during the preparation of these documents to review the park's purpose statement against the establishing legislation, the legislative history, and current science and scholarship, and to determine how best to express the intent in establishing the park for the clearest understanding by all the stakeholders.

It is important to update a park's significance and primary interpretive themes based on new scientific or scholarly information or cultural perceptions about why a park's fundamental resources and values are significant. For example, it may be appropriate to update the significance of a civil war battlefield park to include the importance of the battle in the cessation of slavery or other aspects of the causes and consequences of the war. (The purpose of the park would remain unchanged – to preserve the battlefield and/or to commemorate the battle, for example – but its significance related to that purpose would be expanded.)

A park's primary interpretive themes are closely related to significance and are appropriately updated if the park's significance is updated.

A park's special mandates are appropriately updated if new congressional or other legal requirements (including wilderness designation, special legislation, or legally binding contracts) go into effect.

The summary of servicewide legal and policy requirements is appropriately updated to include new servicewide laws and policies particularly important to park management.

The most likely change to a foundation for planning and management is the addition or the additional analysis of fundamental resources and values or other important resources or values.

GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Purpose and Scope

The purpose of the general management plan is to ensure that park managers and stakeholders share a clearly defined understanding of the resource conditions, opportunities for visitor experiences, and general kinds of management, access, and development that will best achieve the park's purpose and conserve its resources unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

This comprehensive direction for park management is developed by an interdisciplinary team in consultation with relevant offices within the National Park Service, other federal, tribal, state, and local agencies, other interested parties, and the general public. The plan is based on full and proper use of scientific and scholarly information related to existing and potential resource conditions, visitor experiences, environmental impacts, and relative costs of alternative courses of action. (See the more detailed discussion of the process standards on page 26.)

In prescribing the specific conditions and experiences to be achieved and maintained in the park, general management planning takes the long view, which may be decades into the future, especially when dealing with the time frames of natural and cultural processes. Looking forward for 15-20 years, the general management plan focuses on what needs to be achieved over time, but not necessarily in the immediate future. For parks with imperiled resources or unmet visitor demand, these needs often seem beyond the reach of what can be accomplished within current federal budgets. Park managers face a difficult challenge of having to be realistic in their expectations--and not fostering unrealistic public expectations--about the potential for increases in funding for development and operations. At the same time, managers need to be visionary and clear about the resource conditions and visitor experiences desired for the future. Changes in conditions, technology, and new types of partnerships may make what seems unrealistic today appear to be relatively modest 15 or 20 years from now. Other ambitious undertakings may never be realized because of competing demands for limited federal funds. One of the basic functions of the general management plan is to communicate with the public about this difficult balance between public stewardship and public expense, and to explore alternative approaches to park management that will provide good public value over the long term.

The statutory requirements for general management plans were established in 1978 (16 USC 1a-7(b)). They require that all general management plans address

- measures for the preservation of resources
- indications of the types and general intensities of development (including visitor circulation and transportation patterns, systems, and modes), including general locations, timing of implementation, and anticipated costs

- identification of and implementation commitments for visitor carrying capacities
- indications of potential boundary modifications

As general management planning has evolved within the broader framework of all park planning and decision making, these plans are shifting from having a strong development focus (often including one or several site plans) to focusing more on stewardship of natural and cultural resources and the provision of an appropriate range of opportunities for public enjoyment. General management plans still address all four statutory requirements outlined in 1978, but they have become more comprehensive, broader in perspective (addressing issues at a regional and parkwide level rather than focusing on specific sites), and less concerned with specific activities and management actions than with the resource conditions and visitor experiences that should result from management.

This shift in emphasis has evolved out of decades of planning experience by the National Park Service, other federal agencies, and private businesses and nonprofit organizations, which has shown that long-term planning for an agenda of specific actions is not as effective as long-term planning for desired results, with specific actions addressed in a continuous cycle of timely planning, evaluation, and adaptation. This adaptive management approach is consistent with the statutory requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act, which requires all federal agencies to implement a “performance management” model of goal setting, goal-based budgeting and project planning, and evaluation of results compared to goals. Within this model, the general management plan sets the broad goals for the park based on legal and policy requirements, regional and parkwide analyses of resources and values, and consultation with all park stakeholders.

General management plans consider and resolve the various, and sometimes competing, interests in resource protection and opportunities for visitor enjoyment that are within the parameters of the direction derived from law and policy. This decision making is accomplished through *management zoning*. General management plans zone the park for a variety of resource conditions and visitor experiences, based on the intrinsic qualities of particular locations and taking into consideration the range of stakeholder interests and concerns. By dividing the park into management zones, some variety of approaches to resource protection, use, and development can be accommodated, and they can be allocated to suit the inherent resource qualities of different areas of the park. The reasonable range of differences in opinion about which resources and values should be preeminent in which areas are resolved by considering alternative management zoning schemes.

Once the overall approach to the management of particular areas throughout the park is established through management zoning, *area-specific management prescriptions* are developed for each particular area. These prescriptions describe an integrated set of resource conditions and visitor experiences to be achieved and maintained over time, along with indications of the kinds of management and development that would be appropriate to maintaining those conditions. The area-specific management prescriptions also identify the kinds of changes that would be needed to move from the existing to the desired conditions in each particular park area.

In the past park managers did not always try to define and maintain specific resource conditions and associated visitor experiences for a park. Traditionally, as visitors were attracted to park areas with special attractions (like Old Faithful or the Liberty Bell) and to places that were easily accessible, park managers usually responded to higher visitor use levels with more infrastructure and more intensive management to mitigate the effects on park resources. But as sites were altered to accommodate more visitor use, the character of the resources and the associated visitor experiences also were altered. This approach is now changing. Through management zoning, park managers predetermine what kinds of resource conditions should be achieved and maintained, what kinds of associated visitor experiences should be available, and how much of the park should be allocated to each kind of resource condition and associated experience opportunities.

The purposes of management prescriptions have been summarized by a cross section of NPS managers and planners as follows:

<i>Direction without micro-management:</i>	Provide long-term direction for desired conditions of park resources and visitor experiences, while providing managers the flexibility to respond to rapid and constant change.
<i>Linkages:</i>	Establish relationships between natural and cultural resources, resources and visitor experiences, and parks and regional contexts.
<i>Understanding:</i>	Increase understanding of and support for management goals and actions by all stakeholders, including the park staff and the general public.
<i>Accountability:</i>	Contribute to a logical, trackable decision trail by connecting desired conditions for specific locations to the purpose of the park, legal and policy requirements, and analysis of issues and impacts in a public forum.

Management zoning and associated management prescriptions meet the 1978 statutory requirements for general management plans as described below.

- Prescriptions of desired resource conditions and the types and levels of resource management appropriate to achieving those conditions satisfy the requirement to identify measures for the preservation of resources.
- Prescriptions of the appropriate types and levels of development, including modes of transportation, for each zone satisfy the requirement to indicate the types and general intensities of development.
- The prescribed resource conditions and visitor experiences for each zone provide the qualitative parameters for carrying capacity. The term *carrying capacity* is now often interpreted as being similar to “limits of acceptable change” and other concepts that define appropriate levels of use in terms of associated resource conditions and visitor experiences.

Implementation-level planning should not be included in general management plans. General management plans must allow for management flexibility over time to adjust activities to reflect new information and changing circumstances. However, it may be appropriate to develop an implementation plan for a particular program (exotic species control, development or use of a specific facility, collections management, etc.) concurrently with the general plan under the following conditions:

- The need to address a facility or program is closely related to GMP zoning issues.
- The facility or program is a major concern of the public.
- A specific plan of action is required by the enabling legislation.

Unless otherwise directed by Congress, implementation planning should not be conducted until the facility or program is expected to be implemented within the next two to five years (the timeframe within which the analysis is expected to remain current). When an implementation plan is conducted concurrently with a general management plan, the record of decision for the general management plan should be signed before the implementation plan is approved. (See the more detailed discussion of the process standards for implementation plans on page 40.)

A general management plan is the appropriate forum for identifying and discussing potential modifications to park boundaries. Boundary adjustments may appropriately be recommended to

- protect significant resources and values, or to enhance opportunities for public enjoyment related to the park's purpose
- address operational and management issues
- otherwise protect park resources that are critical to fulfilling park purposes

The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 defines three kinds of boundary adjustments that do not require an additional act of Congress: (1) technical revisions, (2) minor revisions based upon statutorily defined criteria, and (3) revisions to include adjacent real property acquired by donation, purchased with donated funds, transferred from any other federal agency, or obtained by exchange. All other boundary adjustments must meet feasibility criteria (see the *NPS Management Policies*), constitute the only adequate alternative for management and resource protection, and be approved by Congress.

Major Elements

The general management plan evolves through a process required by NEPA from a *draft environmental impact statement*, which documents the consideration of an appropriate range of alternatives (alternative plans), to a *final environmental impact statement* and a *record of decision*, which documents the agency's decision, and ultimately to a *final plan*, which guides future park management. This process is addressed in greater detail below but is mentioned here to clarify

how the elements in a final general management plan relate to the elements in a draft environmental impact statement. The standards provided below address the required elements of a final general management plan. All of the elements needed in a final plan should also be included in the alternative plans considered in the environmental impact statement. The first element – the foundation for planning and management – is shared in common by all the GMP alternatives. The remaining elements vary by alternative in the environmental impact statement.

Standards for Elements To Be Included in the Park’s General Management Plan

Element	Brief Definition	Standards
<i>Foundation for Planning and Management</i>	A statement clearly defining the legal and policy requirements that mandate the park’s basic management responsibilities, including the identification and comprehensive analysis of those resources and values determined to be critical to achieving the park’s purpose and maintaining its significance, or to be otherwise important to park planning and management	See the “Standards for Elements To Be Included in the Park’s Foundation for Planning and Management,” page 13.
<i>Management concept</i>	A brief, inspirational statement of the kind of place the park should be (a “vision” statement)	<p>Management concepts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> eloquently and persuasively describe the kind of place the park should be

Standards for Elements To Be Included in the Park's General Management Plan

Element	Brief Definition	Standards
<i>Management zoning</i>	<p>The application of various management overlays (integrated sets of resource conditions and associated visitor experiences) to various geographic areas throughout the park, intended to provide for a variety of resource conditions and visitor uses that are compatible with the park's purpose and preserve its fundamental resources and values</p>	<p>Management zoning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides for some variety of resource conditions and visitor experiences consistent with the park's purpose/significance and the different inherent characteristics of different geographic areas throughout the park • establishes an overall character for the park, consistent with a distinctive management concept, by emphasizing some potential conditions and experiences over others • reflects decisions about which resources and values are preeminent in each particular area of the park • considers the relationships among resources and experiences in adjacent zones and in areas outside the park boundaries • is prescriptive, rather than descriptive (may zone an area for the continuation of existing conditions or may zone it for a dramatic departure from what currently exists)
<i>Area-specific management prescriptions</i>	<p>Area-specific guidance about the desired resource conditions, visitor experience</p>	<p>Area-specific management prescriptions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide long-term direction for desired conditions for park

Standards for Elements To Be Included in the Park's General Management Plan

Element	Brief Definition	Standards
	<p>opportunities, and appropriate kinds and levels of management, development, and access (modes of transportation) for each particular area of the park, based on how it is zoned</p>	<p>resources and visitor experiences—what managers should achieve and where they should achieve it—while providing managers the flexibility to respond to rapid and constant change with discretionary actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • address the desired relationships between natural and cultural resources, resources and visitor experiences, and the park and its regional context
	<p>Area-specific prescriptions also identify the kinds of changes needed to move from the existing to the desired conditions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus on fundamental resources and values • clearly describe desired resource conditions and experiences in enough detail to allow for widely shared understanding by all stakeholders, including park staff and the general public • include assessments of the appropriate kinds and levels of management, development, and access needed to achieve the desired conditions • reflect the best available information from experts and the latest knowledge on best management practices • generally describe the kinds of changes that would have to take place to move from existing to desired conditions; may discuss a range of actions a manager might consider to

Standards for Elements To Be Included in the Park's General Management Plan

Element	Brief Definition	Standards
<i>Identification of potential boundary modifications (if appropriate)</i>	The description of areas or resources that meet criteria for boundary adjustments, along with the rationale for an adjustment	<p>effect the needed change, but focus on conditions rather than management actions—the “what,” not the “how”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> at a minimum, consider a 15- to 20-year time frame for the general management plan (Some resources may require a longer perspective.) <p>Proposals for boundary modifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> must meet established criteria to either (1) protect significant resources and values, or enhance opportunities for public enjoyment related to the park’s purpose, (2) address operational and management issues, or (3) otherwise protect park resources that are critical to fulfilling park purposes
<i>Projected implementation costs</i>	A projection of the probable range of recurring annual costs, initial one-time costs, and life-cycle costs of plan implementation	<p>Implementation cost projections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are lumped into broad categories and presented as ranges to emphasize the level of uncertainty of actual costs at the GMP level of decision making, and the need for more detailed planning to support funding requests include recurring annual costs, initial one-time costs, and life-cycle costs, with additional subcategories as appropriate

Standards for Elements To Be Included in the Park's General Management Plan

Element	Brief Definition	Standards
		<p>to reflect assumptions about the expected major differences in costs among the alternatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are used in a value analysis process to inform the regional director's selection of a preferred alternative

Process Standards

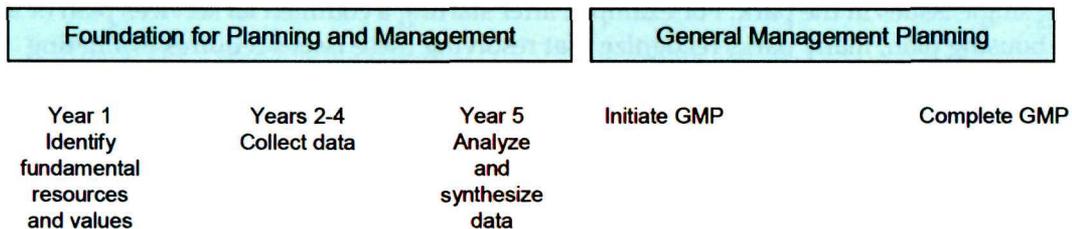
Prerequisites for General Management Planning

General management planning usually should not proceed until the following requirements have been met. These prerequisites are generally the responsibility of park management. If any portion of these requirements is to be met as part of general management planning, it should be identified in the project agreement for the general management plan, and adequate time and funding sources should be identified in the project agreement.

Scientific/Scholarly Information and Analysis

As a prerequisite to general management planning, scientific/scholarly information about the park's fundamental and other important resources and values is analyzed and documented in ways that are meaningful to decision makers.

Parks contemplating a general management plan but without a well-established program of data gathering and analysis may need to allow up to five years for ensuring that adequate information is available to support planning. This estimate is based on one year to comprehensively and systematically identify fundamental resources and values and to apply for supplemental program funds, if needed; three years to gather information (the minimum needed to survey sporadic events or to establish preliminary trend lines); and one year to synthesize the information into forms useful to planners and decision makers.



This sequence of data collection and analysis is the ideal. For recently authorized parks, there may be a legislative requirement or pressing need to begin development of a general management plan on a schedule that would not allow five years advance preparation. In those cases where plans for new parks must be developed before resources and values are comprehensively understood, the plans should identify information needs and anticipate the need for an update or new plan once additional information is available.

If the park has not conducted a formal assessment of park lands and waters for possible inclusion into the national wilderness preservation or the national wild and scenic rivers systems, these assessments should be included in the general management plan or be conducted concurrently.

Stakeholder Interests and Concerns

Before undertaking general management planning, park managers identify and establish channels of ongoing and effective communication with stakeholders, particularly with elected officials and other government agencies with adjacent or overlapping jurisdictions and with traditionally associated groups with strong cultural ties to the park's fundamental resources and values. Stakeholders understand the park's purpose and significance, and park managers understand the potential for partnerships and conflicts surrounding the questions to be addressed by the general management plan.

The establishment of contacts and working relationships with other jurisdictions and potential partners within the region is part of basic park management. All planning processes, and especially general management planning, are more effective and efficient when a collaborative atmosphere has been institutionalized and does not have to be initiated at a point in time when major decisions are imminent.

Staff Understanding and Commitment

Park managers contemplating a general management plan should understand the purpose of the plan and how it may or may not help resolve the park's pressing issues. If a new general management plan is warranted, they can clearly define why they need the plan, and they are committed to carrying out a general management planning process. This includes a commitment to significant involvement by themselves and members of their staffs. Because general management plans are vehicles for resolving the highest levels of controversy about park management, this also involves a willingness to engage in discussions and to make decisions in a highly visible public arena.

The considerable investment of time in developing a general management plan often yields significant savings in the amount of time and expense needed to prepare numerous plans addressing single issues in the park. For example, after starting a commercial services plan or an employee housing plan, many parks recognize that resolving these issues requires evaluating the comprehensive scope of concerns that would normally be addressed in a general management plan.

Establishing the Need for a General Management Plan

GMP Nomination Forms (Project Management Information System)

The initial statement of need for a general management plan is made in the nomination form used for assessing and ranking GMP projects competing for servicewide GMP program funds. These nomination forms ask for descriptions of the major resource management, visitor use, and operational issues the park is facing and how a general management plan might help resolve these issues. Park staffs competing or in line for GMP funding should be working on satisfying the prerequisites for GMP planning. If they do not have a foundation for planning and management, it is advantageous to develop this foundation before the rest of the general management plan. Foundation statements help park staffs identify and satisfy the needs for data, clearly define the decisions that need to be made, understand the scope of the work involved, and be better prepared once GMP funding becomes available to meet their GMP budget and schedule commitments.

GMP Project Agreement

A project agreement is required for all general management plans, regardless of funding source. Generally it is prepared after a park receives a servicewide priority for GMP program funds or when other funding is committed to the project.

The precision of this agreement depends in large part on how successfully the park has accomplished the prerequisites for general management planning. Accurate schedules and costs for general management plans cannot be developed without identifying the other government agencies and private sector organizations who may have a stake in how the park is managed, how the park's purpose interrelates with the purposes of other regional and national jurisdictions, and the potential range of and controversy surrounding the major issues to be addressed by the general management plan.

Through the project agreement the regional director, the park superintendent, the program manager for park planning, and the principal planning office(s) define and agree upon

- project purpose, scope, and expected results
- major issues to be addressed
- primary products and services
- data needs
- compliance requirements
- public involvement, civic engagement, and partnership strategies
- roles and responsibilities for production, consultation, and review
- project schedule, including major milestones
- project budget and funding sources

- project team members and consultants, including their areas of expertise

Refer to the planners' sourcebook for information about the kinds of information to be included in each section of the project agreement.

GMP project agreements should demonstrate that

- The decisions made will satisfy the purpose of and need for a general management plan and will achieve the advantages cited when a project's servicewide priority was requested.
- Adequate data will be available to make the required decisions. (GMP funds will not normally be used to collect basic inventory information.)
- Stakeholders will have meaningful, appropriate, and timely opportunities to listen, to be heard, and to understand the decision-making process.
- NPS and departmental leaders will be consulted at a level appropriate to the issues and required decisions and at appropriate times to ensure the most efficient and effective consultation.
- The agreed to products and services will meet the program standards for general management plans and environmental impact statements.
- The cost of the project will be consistent with the estimate prepared for priority setting. (The project agreement is a commitment to prepare the best possible plan within the authorized budget.)

A project agreement for a general management plan is recommended by the superintendent and the principal planning office(s), cleared for planning policy compliance by the WASO program manager for park planning and special studies, and approved by the regional director. Superintendents and regional directors are responsible for ensuring that plans fulfill their project agreements.

Each project is tracked according to its project agreement. Any major changes to the project's scope, schedule, or cost is documented in a revised project agreement, which is resubmitted to the program manager for park planning and special studies to ensure that the project still complies with park planning policy.

Because the cost estimates considered during priority setting are often prepared several years in advance of plan startup, an appeals process has been established to adjust project budgets for unanticipated changes in cost or scope. GMP program management standards provide that appeals for additional funds up to \$50,000 can be approved by the WASO program manager and appeals for greater amounts are referred to the program advisory committee composed of the seven associate regional directors with responsibility for the GMP program.

Plan Development

Project Team

General management plans are developed by interdisciplinary teams representing all the major park programs in consultation with the NPS leadership, congressional delegations, other federal, tribal, state, and local agencies, scientists and scholars, existing and potential park visitors, traditionally associated groups, park neighbors, cooperating associations and concessioners, other interest groups, and the general public. Technical experts on the park staff are augmented where necessary by regional and WASO staff or other consultants to ensure that the planning team has the necessary expertise to adequately address all the park's fundamental and other important resources and values.

NEPA and NHPA Compliance

Consistent with the NPS *Management Policies*, unless an exception is granted, an environmental impact statement (EIS) is prepared on general management plans. The Environmental Quality Division, through the associate director for natural resources stewardship and science, may grant an exception to the requirement for a GMP/EIS on a case-by-case basis, if site-specific data indicate that none of the projects that might be needed to implement the general management plan will have potential for significant impact or public controversy. Otherwise, a GMP/EIS is a prerequisite for tiering a potential future site-specific EIS for an implementation plan. (A site-specific EIS could not tier off a plan with no EIS.) Director's Order 12 and its accompanying handbook prescribe procedures and requirements for public review, notices, and filing of documents.

The Council on Environmental Quality encourages agencies to use a tiering process, working from broad, general environmental impact analysis documents to more site-specific ones in decision making. When preparing a large-scale plan that determines broad direction, such as the general management plan, information is less detailed and site-specific, because decisions are made on a gross scale. More detailed and site-specific analysis occurs as part of implementation planning, which tiers off the GMP/EIS. Tiering allows decision makers "to focus on the issues which are ripe for decision and exclude from consideration issues already decided or not yet ripe" (CEQ NEPA Regulations).

Reviews required by section 106 of the NHPA occur simultaneously with the analyses required by NEPA. The NHPA review process begun during general management planning usually needs to continue as part of implementation planning. This process is fully described in NPS 28.

Focus on Fundamental Resources and Values

Consideration of the park's fundamental resources and values drives all aspects of the GMP process and outcomes, providing the primary topics for planning issues, desired conditions, impact analyses, and value analysis.

Stakeholders can readily see the linkage between the fundamental resources and values and the park's purpose and significance or other legal or policy requirements, and they can see how the consideration of these things drives the decisions made by the general management plan.

Scientific/Scholarly Analysis

Decision makers understand the ecological, cultural, and social contexts of the park's resources and values. Adequate information is available to describe recent trends in the condition of resources and values and to identify at least some of the factors influencing those trends. (This standard is described in greater detail under "Prerequisites for General Management Planning," page 26.)

Stakeholder Involvement

The planning team consults with federal, tribal, state, and local governments, existing and potential visitors, park neighbors, people with traditional cultural ties to park lands, scientists and scholars, concessioners, cooperating associations, and the general public.

Park managers and planning team members understand the needs and issues important to these stakeholders, and stakeholders understand the mandates and issues important to the National Park Service.

Stakeholders understand the process through which decisions are made, and they are given meaningful, appropriate, and timely opportunities to listen, to be heard, and to understand the issues, the science, the different points of view, and the analysis involved in each stage of the decision-making process.

Full consideration of the interests and concerns of all stakeholders helps ensure that decisions are well informed, widely supported, and sustainable over time.

Identification and Analysis of Alternatives

GMP alternatives focus on the broadest level of decision making for the park, which is generally represented by alternative ways of zoning the park, with associated differences in resource conditions, visitor experiences, and kinds and levels of management, access, and development. These differences give the park a distinctive character under each alternative.

In determining the appropriate range of management discretion relative to a particular park, decision makers and stakeholders should not confuse *desirability* with *feasibility*. The NPS *Management Policies* allow for some level of management discretion in determining the desired conditions for resources and values based on the need to accommodate other equally or more important resources and values. However, this management discretion does not extend to accepting less than optimal conditions as the policy direction because of current fiscal, technological, or other limitations.

Looking forward for 15-20 years, the GMP alternatives focus on long-term commitments rather than on current financial or technological constraints. However, alternatives that would require major changes and substantial increases in funding to move from existing to desired conditions should include a discussion of interim management and the conditions that would be expected within the next five to ten years, based on currently known opportunities and constraints. Alternatives requiring substantial increases in funding should also include a statement that competing requests for limited NPS funds are prioritized through formal processes at the regional and national levels and must demonstrate the best value for the public of all the competing requests from all of the parks.

Impact Analyses. Each alternative is subject to a rigorous analysis of its potential environmental (natural, cultural, and socioeconomic) impacts that meets the standards established by the Council on Environmental Quality. These standards are addressed in detail in DO-12.

Value Analyses. Each alternative is also analyzed to determine its relative cost-effectiveness. Cost estimates at the GMP level are not based on detailed information about specific facilities, operational requirements, or composition of the park staff. Costs are lumped and presented as ranges to emphasize the level of uncertainty at the GMP level and the need for more detailed planning to support funding requests. However, cost estimates should reflect the major assumptions about the annual recurring, one-time capital, and life-cycle costs of each alternative.

For the purpose of this analysis, the known costs of no action are itemized as shown in the following table, and the estimated costs of the action alternatives are compared in terms of broad ranges, reflecting the range of activities that might be needed over time to move from the existing to the desired conditions. The estimated one-time costs for facilities or management activities are further subdivided into major components if that helps explain important differences among the costs of the alternatives. For example, the cost estimate for a relatively small park might identify a single one-time facility development cost of \$2-3 million, while the cost estimate for a large, complex park might identify \$3-5 million for visitor facilities on the north side, \$4-6 million for visitor facilities on the south side, \$15-17 million to repair roads, and \$2-3 million for initial costs to establish a transit system.

	NO ACTION	ACTION‡
Recurring annual costs	Resource protection*	Resource protection
	Visitor experience and enjoyment*	Visitor experience and enjoyment
	Facility maintenance and operations*	Facility maintenance and operations
	Park management and administration*	Park management and administration
One- time costs	Rehabilitation of existing facilities and infrastructure to bring them up to NPS standards**	Rehabilitation of existing facilities and infrastructure to bring them up to NPS standards
		New facilities and infrastructure
		Major research, resource restoration, and visitor support projects (includes project planning and compliance)***
Life-cycle costs	Single total***	Single total
* Source is actual cost of salaries and other annual recurring expenses		
**Source is the asset priority index, which includes condition ratings and actions needed to achieve them.		
*** Total present worth of all costs, calculated for 25 years at a discount rate of 7%		
‡Source is broad assumptions about the probable range of the recurring annual workload or one-time activities (facility construction, research, landscape restoration, reservation system, transportation system, etc.) that might be needed to move from existing to desired conditions. These costs may be further subdivided into major components to better express the major differences among the alternatives.		

The selection of the preferred alternative is informed by (1) a process established and required by the Council on Environmental Quality for identifying the “environmentally preferred” alternative and (2) a value-analysis process (such as *choosing by advantages*) for comparing the relative benefits and costs of alternatives to determine which would provide the best value for the public. The regional director considers all these factors when selecting the preferred alternative.

Review and Approval

Internal draft GMP/EISs are reviewed for policy consistency by the regional and Washington offices. Draft EISs are made available for public review for a minimum of 60 days, initiated by the publication of a notice in the *Federal Register* by the Environmental Protection Agency. Final EISs are subject to a 30-day no-action period after the notice of availability is published. The record of decision (ROD) is signed by the regional director, resulting in approval of the park's management plan and conclusion of the NEPA process.

Final Plans

After ROD approval and publication in the *Federal Register*, a final plan describing only the selected alternative (without all the NEPA compliance pieces) and including the foundation elements is prepared to guide park management for the next 15 to 20 years. The final plan is often useful as a public document, to share information about the park's purpose and long-term goals with partners and other stakeholders.

A summary of the planning process (including dates of major milestones), a list of preparers, a copy of the signed ROD, and a copy of the park's enabling legislation or executive order are appended to the final plan.

No approval signature is required on the final general management plan, since the plan is approved when the regional director signs the ROD. However, caution must be exercised when producing this final plan to ensure that no changes are made in the selected alternative that would alter the approved decision.

Project Closeout

An important part of the GMP process is project closeout, which should include

- a post-project evaluation to examine the strengths and weaknesses in the planning process, to assist in improving future general management plans
- consolidation and filing of the administrative record
- discussion of the next steps needed for plan implementation

Once the general management plan is completed, the park staff will need to identify the activities that should be the highest priorities for the foreseeable future. Updating their program plans and strategic plans should be high on the list, since those plans address specific activities. It may be appropriate for the key participants in the general management plan to stay involved with the park staff as they begin to identify what plans need to be prepared/updated and what activities need to be pursued. Such post-GMP discussions may inform but should not preempt the park's program management or strategic planning processes.

Updates and Amendments

General management plans are reviewed and updated as necessary to keep them current. Such reviews are needed every 15 to 20 years, or sooner if conditions change more rapidly. Even in

parks with strong traditions and entrenched patterns of use and development, decision makers benefit from occasionally stepping back and reassessing their overall goals, particularly if resources are threatened, sites are crowded, visitation patterns change, or the park's built environment requires extensive rehabilitation or maintenance. This gives everyone with a major stake in the park an opportunity to revalidate the park's role in the nation and region and to reconfirm that the kinds of resource conditions and visitor experiences being pursued are the best possible mix for the future.

An approved general management plan may be amended, rather than replaced with a new plan, to address a particular location, such as a new addition to the park, or a particular issue that might require changing some of the management prescriptions included in the general management plan. The decision to amend a plan rather than develop a new plan is a judgment left to the discretion of the superintendent and the regional director, who should base their decision on the magnitude of change and the potential for environmental effects and controversy. If the existing general management plan does not substantially meet the current standards (if it does not include management zoning and management prescriptions), it should be replaced rather than amended. An amendment may be accomplished through an environmental assessment, rather than an environmental impact statement, if it would not result in a significant effect on the human environment or if its potential significant effects have already been analyzed in an EIS.

PARK PROGRAM PLANS

Policy Consistency of Revised Standards

The NPS *Management Policies* currently include program planning as a component of implementation planning (2.3.3 and 2.3.3.1). The policies currently provide for a wide range of program plans (including resource management plans, comprehensive interpretive plans, cultural landscape plans, land protection plans, visitor use plans, and wilderness management plans), and this list can be expanded to include asset management plans, collections management plans, fire management plans, and river management plans, among others. Although these plans generally address specific components of the park environment, the policies encourage park staffs to take an integrated, interdisciplinary approach to each of these plans.

The current standards clarify the framework of park planning to make a greater distinction between program planning and other kinds of implementation planning. Program plans are now more appropriately placed between GMPs and strategic plans in the logical sequence of planning and decision making. Recommendations from program managers inform the strategic planning process, while decisions about park priorities are still made on a parkwide basis through strategic planning. This clarification of the appropriate role of program planning is wholly consistent with the definition of program plans in the NPS *Management Policies* and does not require an update of the policy.

Purpose and Scope

Park managers conduct program planning to identify and recommend strategies for achieving the desired conditions and visitor experiences established in the general management plan. In the absence of a current general management plan (or where a program area was not addressed in the general management plan), staffs may tier their program planning off the park's foundation for planning and management. Park-level program plans are not typically decision-making documents. They are analytical documents, or compilations of information, intended to inform the decision-making that occurs during park strategic planning and subsequent project implementation planning.

Through program planning, park staffs are able to translate the qualitative statements of desired conditions established through general management planning into measurable or objective (based on observation or communication) indicators that can be monitored over time to assess the degree to which the desired conditions are being achieved. Based on knowledge gained through this analysis, technical experts recommend the comprehensive strategies

needed to achieve the desired conditions, which in some instances may require years or decades to achieve. The recommended strategies from all the program areas can then be considered when the park establishes its five-year strategic plan (the document that prioritizes and integrates the recommendations from all the individual program areas).

Park program planning is best accomplished in a cycle that allows for updates to be completed about every five years, just slightly in advance of the strategic planning cycle. Based on knowledge gained through these analyses, recommendations about the strategies needed to achieve desired conditions are available to inform strategic planning.

Because program management plans are analytical documents that tier from the decisions made in the general management plan, they typically do not require NEPA or NHPA compliance documentation, although consultations with stakeholders who have responsibilities for resources in and adjacent to the park, such as the state historic preservation officer in the case of historic properties or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the case of threatened or endangered species, is recommended.

The requirements for park-level program planning are established in management policies or identified by the WASO program leads. Each WASO program manager has authority to describe the specific requirements and standards for their functional program plans. Specific standards and implementation guidance are provided by program managers through director’s orders and other manuals. Two examples of existing program plans currently cited in the NPS *Management Policies* are comprehensive interpretive plans, which are required of all parks (7.2.2), and land protection plans (3.3). New guidance will soon be issued for program planning for resource stewardship. Regional and park program managers may identify additional needs for program planning beyond those required of all parks.

Major Elements and Process Standards

Standards for Elements To Be Included in Program Plans

Element	Brief Definition	Standards
<i>Indicators of desired conditions</i>	The <i>quantifiable or otherwise objective (based on observation or communication)</i> indicators and targets established by program scientists or scholars to monitor the attainment of desired resource conditions or visitor experiences	Refer to the standards and guidance provided by the functional program managers. This guidance may be found in the list of director’s orders posted on the internet.
Recommended comprehensive strategies	Recommendations about specific actions needed to achieve or maintain desired resource conditions and visitor experiences	

PARK STRATEGIC PLAN

Purpose and Scope

In its initial response to the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, the National Park Service implemented a performance management system that required the development of GPRA-compliant strategic plans for each unit of the national park system. The 1998 program standards for park planning included these park strategic plans and described them in terms of the contents specified by GPRA. Since then, the National Park Service's performance management system has been revised in response to direction from the Department of the Interior. Under the new system, only the Department is required to produce a GPRA-compliant strategic plan. The departmental bureaus, including the National Park Service, and the individual parks support the departmental strategic planning requirements by setting and reporting on performance goals that can be aggregated into a comprehensive overview of the performance of the Department as a whole.

Even though it is no longer required to comply with GPRA, park-level strategic planning remains a critical step in the framework of park planning and decision making. The primary purpose of strategic planning – to determine what the park staff intends to accomplish in the foreseeable future – has not changed. Strategic planning is distinguished from general management planning by its mid-range time frame. Strategic planning is the process through which park managers collaboratively consider the park as a whole and come to a shared understanding of their highest priorities. While general management plans describe what ultimately *should* be achieved, the strategic plan describes what realistically *can be* achieved – based on considerations of feasibility as well as desirability – within the foreseeable future (generally the next five years). What is considered feasible may vary greatly from one five-year period to the next, depending upon the state of technology, the national budget, and the current interests of the American people, among other things. Retaining strategic planning as an integral part of the park planning framework helps ensure that decisions inevitably influenced by technology, money, and public opinion remain focused on what is most important about the park, as established through the park's foundation statement and general management plan.

Although park staffs are no longer required to prepare GPRA-compliant strategic plans, they are required to establish measurable performance goals that can be aggregated into the performance goals of the Department of the Interior. In setting their five-year goals, park staffs look for the best fit between the priorities established by the Department and the priorities of the individual park based on its current problems (threats to the integrity of ecological systems or cultural properties, dissatisfaction among visitors, crowded or deteriorating facilities) and opportunities (potential for partnerships, the probable availability of project funds, the possibility of achieving efficiencies by coordinating related projects). After considering all these factors, the park management team projects where it realistically hopes to be at the end of the next five years in terms of resource conditions and visitor experiences, it describes how those performance goals relate to the performance goals established for the Department as a whole, and it outlines a strategy (integrated set of actions) for achieving those goals.

Major Elements

Standards for Elements to be Included in the Park Strategic Plan

Element	Brief Definition	Standards
<i>Performance goals</i>	Statements of what the park intends to achieve over approximately the next five years, expressed as measurable desired conditions	<p>Performance goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are outcomes, stated as desired conditions, for natural and cultural resources and visitor experiences are quantifiable, with clear indicators, performance targets, and completion dates are understandable to the general public
<i>Parkwide strategy</i>	A general plan of action for the next three to five years, needed to achieve the five-year goals	<p>The parkwide strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> describes the actions needed to achieve the park's five-year goals considers, integrates, and prioritizes the recommendations from individual program plans

Process Standards

Park strategic planning is generally conducted by the park management team in consultation with the full park staff. Involvement of stakeholders is left to the discretion of the park manager, although it is recommended that the involvement of potential partners and the general public in strategic planning can be a powerful tool for expanding the finances and human resources available to the park.

Analysis required for strategic planning includes consideration of gaps between existing and desired conditions for all the park's important resources and values (as tracked by the park's program managers) and consideration of existing funding and staffing levels and how they might be allocated or augmented to improve or maintain certain conditions (as determined through business planning; see the inset, below).

Because strategic planning is primarily a priority-setting process that tiers off the park's general management plan, it does not require compliance with NEPA or the NHPA. The additional analysis required under these laws to complete their compliance requirements for site-specific analysis is accomplished during project implementation planning.

Technical guidance for performance planning and reporting using the Performance Management Data System is available on the internet.

What are business plans and how do they relate to the planning framework?

Business plans are analytical tools for financial management within the National Park Service. They provide park managers with a framework for analyzing financial decision-making within individual park units. Business plans:

- increase park financial accountability and transparency through presentation of financial information in clear, concise terms for internal and external audiences
- analyze historical data relating to funding, park growth in real terms, visitation trends, and a detailed analysis of current park expenditures, by program area
- identify park operational and investment priorities (as determined through the GMP, strategic plan and other park planning initiatives) and outline methods for achieving management goals in the future
- tier from the park GMP and inform park strategic and performance plans, quantifying resources required and available for all park programs
- provide a means of calculating expenditures towards strategic goals, and therefore provide a replicable process for collecting quantitative data for GPRA reporting documents
- are produced through voluntary participation using the online Business Plan Developer System at <http://www.bpi.nps.gov/>

IMPLEMENTATION PLANS

Purpose and Scope

Implementation plans tier off general management plans, program management plans, and strategic plans and describe the high-priority actions that will be taken over the next several years to help achieve the desired conditions and visitor experiences for the park.

Major Elements

The contents of implementation plans may vary widely, depending upon whether the plan is directing a specific project (such as a controlled burn, the stabilization of a historic structure, or the design of a site or a facility) or an ongoing activity (such as the periodic requirements of maintaining a historic structure, controlling an exotic species, or maintaining a campground). All implementation plans generally include schedules and cost estimates needed for budgeting and work loading.

Some kinds of implementation plans have specific content and process requirements established by the WASO program managers. If they are not familiar with these requirements, park staffs should contact the appropriate regional or WASO program managers to see if standards or guidelines exist for the specific activities they are planning. An overview of director's orders and related documents is provided on the NPS intranet.

Process Standards

Prerequisites for Implementation Planning

Implementation planning is generally deferred until the activity or project under consideration has sufficient priority (established through strategic planning) to indicate that action will be taken within the next two to five years. Therefore, implementation planning will usually tier off one of the goals identified in the park strategic plan. Then, based on the general recommendations developed as part of program management planning, it will analyze the feasible alternatives for achieving the strategic goal. Deferring implementation planning until the action has been given sufficient priority to anticipate funding in the next two to five years helps ensure that decisions about how to best achieve a certain goal are relevant, timely, and based on current data.

Project Agreement

Project agreements are developed for complex implementation plans. Through these agreements the superintendent and the principal planning offices define and agree from the beginning on the scope of the planning project, the information requirements, the products and services to be produced, the roles and responsibilities for production, consultation, and review, and a project schedule, including major milestones. The project agreement also includes a cost estimate that specifies salary costs by contributing offices and other costs for travel, contracts, and printing.

NEPA and NHPA Compliance

Since many issues involving the human environment are resolved through implementation planning, rather than general management planning, the NEPA and NHPA section 106 processes begun during general management planning usually need to continue as part of implementation planning. This process is fully described in the NEPA handbook that accompanies DO-12 and the *Cultural Resource Management Guidelines*.

Environmental compliance for implementation plans must demonstrate a rigorous analysis of the potential environmental (natural, cultural, and socioeconomic) impacts of a reasonable range of alternatives.

Reviews required by section 106 of the NHPA occur simultaneously with analyses required by NEPA. The information and mitigation gathered as part of the 106 review is included in the NEPA document, and the 106 process must be completed before a *finding of no significant impact* or a *record of decision* can be signed on a proposal that affects historic properties.

Cost Estimates and Value Analysis

Adequate cost data for project or activity plans include recurring annual costs, initial one-time costs, and life-cycle costs (total present worth of all costs, calculated for 25 years at a discount rate of 7%). Development packages require class C estimates based on the best information available regarding similar facilities at other locations and known construction cost trends. They also require projections of facility staffing and maintenance costs. Considerations for selecting a preferred alternative include a value-analysis process for comparing the relative benefits and costs of each alternative.

Consultation and Approval

Implementation plans are normally developed by interdisciplinary park teams in consultation with program experts in the field and the national program support centers to help ensure they are consistent with all legal mandates, NPS management policy, and servicewide direction. Implementation plans are generally recommended by the park manager and approved by the regional director.

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE PLAN AND ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

Purpose and Scope

Annual performance plans set the park’s goals and work priorities for the upcoming year. They tier off the park’s strategic plan to describe quantifiable, realistic goals for a specific fiscal year and the details about how those goals will be achieved in terms of both inputs (funds, staffing, equipment, supplies, expertise) and outputs (products and services). By tiering off the park’s strategic plan, they help ensure that work is focused on the park’s highest priorities.

Annual performance reports document whether the park’s annual goals were achieved, and if not, why. This knowledge is essential for adaptive management to achieve the park’s short-term and long-term goals.

Major Elements

Standards for Elements To Be Included in the Park’s Annual Performance Plan and Report

Element	Brief Definition	Standards
<i>Park annual goals</i>	The measurable goals the park staff plans to achieve over the next year	Annual goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tier directly from the park strategic goals, showing what portion of the strategic goals will be achieved each year • are outcomes, stated as desired conditions of natural and cultural resources and visitor experiences
<i>Annual work plan</i>	A comprehensive plan for allocating budget and FTEs to accomplish the highest priority work for	Annual work plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tier off the annual goals, describing the outputs and inputs

Standards for Elements To Be Included in the Park's Annual Performance Plan and Report

Element	Brief Definition	Standards
<i>Achieved results</i>	the next year Actual resource conditions or visitor experiences determined through monitoring or communication with visitors	needed to accomplish them <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reflect parkwide priorities (rather than division priorities) Annual results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> document actual results related to annual goals

Process Standards

Annual performance planning is generally conducted by the park management team in consultation with the full park staff. It does not require stakeholder consultation or NEPA or NHPA compliance.

ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND FUNDING

Park superintendents are responsible for

- identifying planning needs
- prioritizing planning work as part of unified priority setting for the park
- securing funding

The superintendent and regional director are accountable for

- accomplishing planning projects
- ensuring that they are consistent with all legal mandates, NPS management policy, generally accepted preservation standards and practices, and servicewide direction

The regional director

- ensures that the foundation statement and general management plan are prepared in consultation with the associate directors and WASO program managers
- recommends further consultation with the NPS director and officials in the Department of the Interior on issues that may be of special interest to the director and secretary.

WASO program managers are responsible for

- formulating and advising on NPS management policy
- managing servicewide program funds to support the planning and information needs of parks in ways that provide the most benefit for the national park system as a whole

The national program centers and regional support offices are responsible for

- completing assigned projects
- providing technical support and consulting services

Park planning activities are funded through a variety of sources. The key sources for each kind of planning are identified below:

- Foundation statements are funded primarily out of the park operating base, since the largest part of the workload involves the identification and analysis of fundamental resources and values, a basic responsibility of park management. When foundation statements are developed separate from a general management plan, GMP discretionary funds may be used to support this exercise with facilitated work sessions and document preparation, at the discretion of the regional planning program managers. When foundation statements are created as the first phase of a park's general management plan, facilitated work sessions and documentation are funded out of the GMP project funds.

- General management planning and analysis are funded primarily through GMP program funds. Planning project budgets should anticipate that salaries of base-funded staff in regions, support offices, and parks will be a significant source of support for general management planning. The Planning Leadership Group recommends servicewide priorities for GMP program funds to the associate director for park planning, facilities and lands. Annual funding allocations are compiled and recommended by the program manager for park planning and special studies and approved by the associate director for park planning, facilities and lands. GMP funds are normally not used to collect basic inventory information about natural and cultural resources or visitor use. Planning data needs are scoped in advance of an anticipated start-up to allow for the coordination with resource management and visitor service programs and the completion of an adequate data base to support decision making.
- Program management plans are funded primarily out of the park operating base with regional support as appropriate.
- Park strategic planning and annual performance planning and reporting are funded primarily out of the park operating base.
- Implementation planning is undertaken using all appropriate and available NPS and non-NPS sources of funds, equipment, services, and personnel. Implementation planning generally is funded through project funding available for the specific type of project addressed by the plan. If project funds are unavailable or inadequate, other sources are sought. Within the National Park Service these include park base, regional base, the inventory and monitoring program and other natural and cultural resource programs, the fee-demonstration program, the challenge cost-share program, construction project planning, cooperative ecosystem studies units and NPS learning centers, and the volunteers-in-parks program. Outside the National Park Service this includes collaborative projects with other federal agencies, state agencies, local governments, Indian tribes, scientific and educational institutions, and conservation and preservation organizations. Collaborative projects with partners might involve joint funding, grants, sharing personnel and equipment, and providing services at little or no cost to the National Park Service. Park staffs use the Project Management Information System to request funding for their implementation planning and compliance, including planning and compliance for development concepts.

Planning for imminent resource management, visitor services, or construction projects may overlap with general management planning, so long as decisions needed at the general management planning level precede and direct the more detailed decisions about projects and activities. However, only the GMP portion of this decision making is funded through the GMP program. An exception may be granted for very small historic sites and monuments (a historic home, possibly with grounds, is a good example) if they have no major GMP issues and simple implementation planning needs (costing up to \$25,000). For these parks the advantages to the National Park Service of completing implementation planning with GMP funds is considered in computing the overall cost-effectiveness of the project.