



Introduction57

Park Purpose58

Park Significance58

Fundamental and Other Important Resources and Values.....59

Interpretive Themes.....63

Legislative Mandates and Special Designations.....64

Foundation for Planning



A riparian zone that is biologically diverse and contains globally rare communities.



The waters of the New River system contain a mosaic of hydrologic features and aquatic habitats, support a unique aquatic ecosystem, and nourish a riparian zone that supports rare plants, animals and communities.



A highly productive aquatic ecosystem includes a broad array of aquatic life.

*Opposite side: Claypool Falls – one of the park's many riverine hydrologic features.
Section Divider Photos: NPS/Gary Hartley*



Sandstone Falls in the Upper Gorge. (Photo: NPS/Gary Hartley)

New River Gorge National River FOUNDATION FOR PLANNING

INTRODUCTION

Developing a foundation plan for the park is the first step in the National Park Service planning framework and in developing a park's general management plan. It concentrates on why a park was established and describes the park's purpose and significance. It also identifies the park resources and values that are "fundamental" to achieving the purpose and significance, as well as special mandates and legal and policy requirements that define a park's basic management responsibilities. Early in the GMP planning process, an interdisciplinary planning team assembled the *Foundation Plan for New River Gorge National River* (NPS 2011). This process included additional research to better understand and document the significance of park resources, the existing patterns of visitor use, and issues related to the management of park resources and visitor use. It also involved extensive public involvement. Following is a summary of the foundation plan highlights.

PARK PURPOSE

Park purpose statements convey the reasons for which the park was set aside as a unit of the national park system. They are grounded in a thorough analysis of park legislation and legislative history, and provide fundamental criteria against which the appropriateness of general management plan recommendations, operational decisions, and actions are tested.

The purposes of New River Gorge National River are to:

- preserve an important free-flowing segment of the New River
- preserve, protect, and conserve outstanding resources and values in and around the New River Gorge, including geologic and hydrologic features, terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, historic and archeological resources, cultural heritage, and scenic character
- provide opportunities for public understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of the park's natural, cultural, scenic, and recreational resources and values

PARK SIGNIFICANCE

Park significance statements express why, within a national, regional, and systemwide context, the park's resources and values are important enough to warrant national park designation. They 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, and reflect the most current scientific or scholarly inquiry and cultural perceptions, which may have changed since the park's establishment.

The following six statements express why the resources and values of New River Gorge National River are important enough to warrant national park designation:

- Flowing water is the definitive creative force shaping the geologic features of the New River Gorge. The New River, one of the oldest rivers in the world, continues to sculpt the longest and deepest river gorge in the Appalachian Mountains.
- The waters of the New River system contain a mosaic of hydrologic features and aquatic habitats, support a unique aquatic ecosystem, and nourish a riparian zone that supports rare plants, animals, and communities.
- New River Gorge National River lies at the core of a globally significant forest, contains the most diverse flora of any river gorge in central and southern Appalachia, and provides essential habitat for endangered mammals and rare birds and amphibians.
- New River Gorge National River contains a large, outstanding, and representative group of historic places that testify to the experiences of those diverse people who settled and developed this part of Appalachia between the 19th and mid-20th centuries.
- New River Gorge National River has diverse and extraordinary scenic resources and views accessible to visitors from the river, rocky overlooks, trails, and rural roads throughout the park.
- New River Gorge National River provides visitors with exceptional opportunities for exploration, adventure, discovery, solitude, and community.



FUNDAMENTAL AND OTHER IMPORTANT RESOURCES AND VALUES

Dusk and dawn offer different moods along the New River. (Photo: NPS/Gary Hartley)

Park fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes, including opportunities for visitor enjoyment that warrant primary consideration during planning and management because they are critical to achieving the park's purpose and maintaining its significance.

Other important resources and values are those attributes that are important to park management and planning, although they are not related to the park's purpose and significance.

The following statements describe the fundamental and other important resources and values of New River Gorge National River that warrant primary consideration during planning and management or that are important to park management and planning:



Significance Statement 1

Flowing water is the definitive creative force shaping the geologic features of the New River Gorge. The New River, one of the oldest rivers in the world, continues to sculpt the longest and deepest river gorge in the Appalachian Mountains.

FUNDAMENTAL RESOURCES AND VALUES

- geologic processes and the features they have created that exemplify the geology of the Appalachian Plateau, including the exposure of 1000 meters of sandstone and shale representing 60 million years of geologic time, house-sized boulders scattered from rim to river, plant and invertebrate fossils, steep channel drop-offs, and coal seams composed of some of the best bituminous coal in the world



Significance Statement 2

The waters of this free flowing segment of the New River system contain a mosaic of hydrologic features and aquatic habitats, support a unique aquatic ecosystem, and nourish a riparian zone that supports rare plants, animals, and communities.

FUNDAMENTAL RESOURCES AND VALUES

- a variety and density of riverine hydrologic features and processes unparalleled in the Eastern United States, including pools, backwaters, glides, runs, shoals, riffles, torrents, cascades, chutes, rapids, and waterfalls
- a highly productive aquatic ecosystem that includes distinct assemblages of native fish (many found nowhere else), mussels, crayfish, macroinvertebrates, and a broad array of other aquatic life, including rare amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals
- a riparian zone that is the most biologically diverse part of the park, and that contains globally rare communities and essential habitat for several rare species

OTHER IMPORTANT RESOURCES AND VALUES

- other aquatic/wetland resources, including vernal pools, wetlands, ephemeral streams, and seeps that provide habitat for rare species
- clean water that supports healthy aquatic and riparian environments

From top:

The Endless Wall Trail's Diamond Point offers views of challenging rapids, popular climbing routes, and cultural remnants of the last mining operation in the gorge at Kaymoor. (Photo: NPS/Gary Hartley)

Two miles above the New River, Dunloup Creek Falls cascades 20 feet over a sandstone ledge into quieter pools. Part of 9,000 miles of tributary that make up the 7,000 square mile New River watershed, water quality is monitored at this and other sites within the park. (Photo: NPS/Gary Hartley)

Significance Statement 3

New River Gorge National River lies at the core of a globally significant forest, contains the most diverse flora of any river gorge in central and southern Appalachia, and provides essential habitat for endangered mammals and rare birds and amphibians.

FUNDAMENTAL RESOURCES AND VALUES

- rare expanse of unfragmented and varied forest types
- a diverse mosaic of habitats occurring over a large elevational gradient that supports forty identified plant communities containing at least 1,342 species and 54 rare plants
- abundant and diverse breeding populations of birds that spend part of their lives in the tropics but depend upon the unfragmented forests here for breeding, especially wood warblers, vireos, and thrushes

OTHER IMPORTANT RESOURCES AND VALUES

- clean air



Significance Statement 4

New River Gorge National River contains a large, outstanding and representative group of historic places that testify to the experiences of those diverse people who settled and developed this part of Appalachia between the 19th and mid-20th centuries.

FUNDAMENTAL RESOURCES AND VALUES

- rare historic colliery structures and coke ovens of unmatched integrity, such as at Nuttallburg and Kaymoor, and the historic structures and ruins associated with more than 50 company owned towns
- railroad depots, rail yards, rail grades, steel and timber trestle bridges, railroad equipment, archeological sites and associated towns, such as Thurmond, developed to support the railroad
- rare surviving examples of subsistence farms, such as Trump-Lily and Richmond-Hamilton

OTHER IMPORTANT RESOURCES AND VALUES

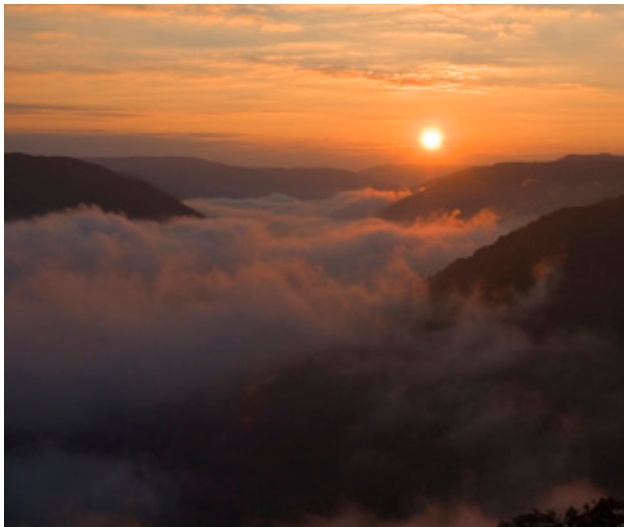
- former community sites, homesteads, and other places in the park where the ancestors of families long associated with the New River lived and worked and where their living descendants today have traditional associations and land-based ties
- the knowledge and cultural values of the families long associated with New River Gorge who have traditionally used the waters of the New River system, the aquatic plants and animals that inhabit those waters, and the native terrestrial plants and animals in and around New River Gorge
- the history and archeology associated with the park's lumbering industry, Civilian Conservation Corps-era state parks, and Native Americans



From top:

Grandview's Main Overlook provides sweeping panoramic views that, on a clear day, stretch for miles. (Photo: NPS/Gary Hartley)

The Nuttallburg Tipple and other structures at this site were stabilized to showcase Nuttallburg's ninety year span of history in the New River Gorge. (Photo: NPS/Gary Hartley)



From top:

Sunrise over the gorge viewed from Grandview. (Photo: NPS/Gary Hartley)

A footbridge spans Glade Creek, is a favorite site for visitors to view the natural resources of the park. (Photo: NPS/Gary Hartley)

Significance Statement 5

New River Gorge National River has diverse and extraordinary scenic resources and views accessible to visitors from the river, rocky overlooks, trails, and rural roads throughout the park.

FUNDAMENTAL RESOURCES AND VALUES

- panoramic views of the New River, its gorge, and other landforms shaped by the New River as it cuts through the Appalachian Plateau
- cultural landscapes that reflect settlement and industry influenced by a rugged and isolated setting

OTHER IMPORTANT RESOURCES AND VALUES

- natural visibility and lightscape, both in daytime and at night

Significance Statement 6

New River Gorge National River provides visitors with exceptional opportunities for exploration, adventure, discovery, solitude, and community.

FUNDAMENTAL RESOURCES AND VALUES

- experience and enjoyment visitors derive from the direct interaction with the park's outstanding scenic, natural, and cultural resources through a variety of recreational activities

OTHER IMPORTANT RESOURCES AND VALUES

- experience of a tranquil setting characterized by largely natural sounds

INTERPRETIVE THEMES

Interpretive themes are ideas, concepts, or stories that are central to the park's purpose, significance, identity, and visitor experience. The primary interpretive theme and subthemes define concepts that every visitor should have the opportunity to learn. They also provide the framework for the park's interpretation and educational programs, influence the visitor experience, and provide direction for planners and designers of the park's exhibits, publications, and audiovisual programs. Subsequent interpretive planning may elaborate on these themes.

The New River and Geologic Processes

The ancient New River and its tributaries, together with the forces of geological processes, continue to sculpt the gorge, shape the landscape of its watershed, and reveal a sequence of rock layers that serve as windows into time.

Ecological Diversity, Uniqueness, and Abundance

With its mosaic of varied, unique, and unbroken habitats, and the quality of its air, water, and night sky, the lands and waters in and around the New River Gorge are sanctuary for a remarkable array of native plants and animals.

Barrier, Corridor, and Refuge

Through time, the New River Gorge has been: a barrier to travel, economic prosperity, and communication; a corridor for navigation, migration, and exploitation; and a refuge for both people and wildlife.

Exploitation

The industrialization of America came at a cost; New River Gorge is a reminder not only of the exploitation of resources, but also the exploitation of people in an age of unrestricted capitalism.

A Rugged Land, A Rugged People

Whether securing sustenance or extracting wealth from this rugged land, the people of New River Gorge developed a culture of hard labor, perseverance, and faith just to maintain a lifestyle that was devoid of luxury or ease.

Evolving Ethics and Changing Perceptions of the Land

Over time, human perceptions of the value of the land in and around the New River Gorge have shifted dramatically from a challenging wilderness to be conquered and exploited to a treasured wildness to be enjoyed and protected for future generations.

The remains of coal towns such as Kaymoor and Nuttallburg tell the story of coal miners who once worked and lived in the gorge. Nuttallburg miners from the 1920s pose for a photo.





Commercial and private boaters follow the same path that once provided a corridor for early exploration. (Photo: NPS/Gary Hartley)

LEGISLATIVE MANDATES AND SPECIAL DESIGNATIONS

A number of legislative mandates and other special designations provide direction as to how the park is to be managed (appendix C). Several federal and state natural resource management programs have designated the New River and its associated wildlife and habitat as areas of special management interest. These designations generally require elevated review of federal and state actions that have the potential to impact significant river-related resources and values. They also generally mandate avoidance or minimization of impacts on special resources.

Outstanding Remarkable Values (National Park Service 1982)

The New River from Bluestone Dam to Gauley Bridge is listed on the Nationwide Rivers Inventory of free-flowing rivers with Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) pursuant to Section 5(d) of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (16 U.S.C 1271-1287). The New River possesses four ORVs, including:

- wildlife (23 federally-designated threatened or endangered species, including New River crayfish, big mouth chub, Kanawha darter, New River snail, and ephemeral cave scud)
- culture (the New River Bridge – the largest expansion bridge in the world)
- recreation (a nationally recognized whitewater recreation area)
- geology (reported to be the oldest river – geologically – in North America)

All federal agencies must seek to avoid or mitigate actions that would adversely affect the river.



Nationally Significant and Unique Wildlife Ecosystem (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1977)

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources have designated the New River as a nationally significant and unique wildlife ecosystem. These areas have wildlife or wildlife habitat values that go beyond local values in the sense that they provide substantial benefits to the public over a wide geographical area or are significantly different from other habitats in an area.

NPS wildlife biologist releases a peregrine falcon into the gorge as part of a restoration program for the species. (Photo: NPS/Gary Hartley)

Resource Category 1 Habitat (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1986)

Habitat of the New River is designated a Resource Category 1 habitat for purposes of determining actions required to mitigate the impacts of federal actions to fish and wildlife populations, their habitat, and the human uses thereof. Federal actions include: actions requiring a federally-issued permit or license that would impact waters of the United States; major federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment; and other federal actions for which the U.S. FWS has legislative authority or executive direction for involvement. Resource Category 1 habitat includes habitat of high value for evaluation species and is unique and irreplaceable on a national basis or in the ecoregion section. The mitigation goal is no loss of existing habitat value. The U.S. FWS management guideline states that:

- all losses of existing habitat be prevented as these one-of-a-kind areas cannot be replaced
- insignificant changes that do not result in adverse impacts on habitat value may be acceptable provided they will have no significant cumulative impact

Riparian Habitat is home to ash, birch, sycamore, and alder line the riverbanks. Dominant species found within the bottomland forests are part of the most biologically diverse river system in the central and southern Appalachia. (Photo: NPS/Gary Hartley)



High Quality Stream (State of West Virginia, 1986)

The New River is classified by the state of West Virginia as a high quality stream. These include streams with native or stocked populations of trout and native warmwater streams five or more miles in length with desirable fish populations that are utilized by the public. Policy directs public agencies to avoid actions that impact fish populations (especially trout) in high quality streams.

American Heritage River (Executive Order 13061, 1998)

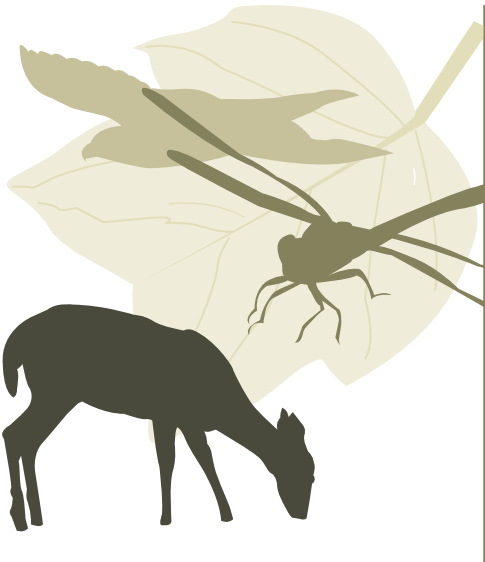
The New River in Virginia, North Carolina, and West Virginia is designated an American Heritage River. The American Heritage River Initiative offers streamlined access to federal resources for projects that are created, planned, and implemented by local communities who voluntarily participate. The federal role in management of American Heritage Rivers is to solely support community-based efforts to preserve, protect, and restore designated rivers and their communities.

Protected Stream (State of West Virginia, 1969)

The New River from its confluence with the Gauley River to its confluence with the Greenbrier River is designated a protected stream within the state's natural streams preservation system. Protected streams are to be managed for the use and enjoyment of the citizens of West Virginia in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as free-flowing streams, and so as to provide for their protection and preservation in their natural character. Regulations state that permits will not be granted for work that will materially alter or affect the free-flowing characteristics of a substantial part of a protected stream.

Aquatic Resource of National Importance (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2007)

The New River is designated an Aquatic Resource of National Importance (ARNI). As such, individual permits for discharges of dredged or fill material are eligible for a higher level of review within the Department of the Army. Factors used in identifying ANRIs include: economic importance of the aquatic resource, rarity or uniqueness, and/or importance of the aquatic resource to the protection, maintenance, or enhancement of the quality of the nation's waters.



General Management Plan Purpose.....67

Planning Process.....69

Consultation and Coordination.....70

Wilderness Designation.....72

Plan Background



Rare habitats including cliff and rimrock habitats.



A large mosaic of habitat provides refuge for rare species, such as the peregrine falcon.

New River Gorge National River lies at the core of a globally significant forest, contains the most diverse flora of any river gorge in central and southern Appalachia, and provides essential habitat for endangered mammals and rare birds and amphibians.

*Opposite side: An unfragmented globally rare forest encompassing varied forest types.
Section Divider Photos: NPS/Gary Hartley*



New River Gorge National River PLAN BACKGROUND

A young visitor assists a wildlife biologist in feeding young peregrine falcons in a “hack” box where young falcons live until they fledge and are released from the structure (Photo: NPS/Gary Hartley)

GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN PURPOSE

The purpose of the general management plan is to provide a decision-making framework that ensures that management decisions effectively and efficiently carry out the NPS mission at New River Gorge National River. NPS managers at the park routinely make many difficult decisions about the preservation of the park’s significant natural and cultural resources for public enjoyment, about competing demands for limited resources, about priorities for using available funds and staff, and about differing local and nationwide interests and views of what is most important at the park. The decision making framework in the park’s GMP will provide the guidance to make these management choices in a manner that is consistent with the purposes for which New River Gorge National River was established by Congress as a unit of the national park system and that protects the park’s fundamental and other important resources and values.

The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.

Many considerations suggest that a new GMP is needed for New River Gorge National River. The current GMP for the park is over 20 years old. The NPS has implemented many of its recommendations. Some are no longer appropriate because of changing conditions and circumstances. New issues have emerged in recent years that the GMP does not address because they were not anticipated in 1982 when the plan was prepared. Recent NPS policies related to management and planning for all national park system units are not reflected in the plan.

This new general management plan replaces the existing *New River Gorge General Management Plan* (NPS 1982). It will guide management decision making at the park for the next 15 to 20 years by:

- ensuring that the park's fundamental and other important resources and values are preserved and protected
- meeting NPS legal requirements for comprehensive general management planning as a guide for more specific projects, to base decisions on adequate environmental information and analysis, and to track progress toward goals
- providing a logical trackable rationale for NPS decision-making that focuses first on why the park was established and what the desired future conditions of those resources should be
- considering the concerns, expectations, and values of the public and of the remaining private landowners in the park related to land protection and management of resources and visitor experience in the park
- ensuring that management decisions by the NPS promote the efficient use of public funds and that managers are accountable to the public for their management decisions

The plan is essentially an agreement among the NPS, its partners at New River Gorge National River, and the public as to what resource conditions and visitor experiences should exist at the park and how those conditions can best be achieved and maintained over time.

The four basic elements required of the plan, as required by PL 95-625, are:

- measures for preservation of the area's natural and cultural resources
- types and general intensities of development associated with public enjoyment and use of the area, including general locations, timing of implementation, and costs
- visitor carrying capacities and implementation commitments for all areas of the park
- potential park boundary modifications and the reasons for the proposed changes

Full implementation of the plan could be many years in the future. Plan approval does not guarantee that funding and staffing needed to implement the plan will be forthcoming. Implementation will depend on future NPS funding and servicewide priorities. Some actions will also depend upon partnership funds, time, and effort.

Future program and implementation plans, describing specific actions that managers intend to undertake and accomplish, will tier from the desired conditions and long-term goals set forth in the plan. NPS will complete additional feasibility studies and more detailed planning, environmental documentation, and consultations, as appropriate, before the NPS can implement certain actions in the selected alternative.

PLANNING PROCESS

Development of the GMP alternatives occurred through a progression of planning steps used by the NPS to prepare GMPs for all units of the national park system, as outlined in the *NPS General Management Planning Dynamic Sourcebook* (NPS 2008b). The park's GMP planning team led the process, conducting many internal planning workshops, and hosting frequent collaborative work sessions with other interested parties, including the full park staff, the general public, local governments, civic organizations, park user groups, and various federal, state, and local agencies.

The process initially focused on developing the park's *Foundation for Planning* (NPS 2009). This summarized what is most important about the park and provided the basic guidance for management decisions made at the park. The NPS hosted public meetings in January 2006 to obtain public comment on the proposed statements of the park's purpose, significance, fundamental and other important resources and values, and interpretive themes as part of developing the foundation plan. Newsletters were issued in advance of the January and May meetings.

The planning process then turned to identifying management issues and concerns and developing a long-term vision for the park. The NPS invited the public to assist with these tasks at three sets of public meetings, held in February, March, and May 2006. Five categories of issues emerged related to resource management, visitor experience and visitor use, working with local communities, land protection, and partnerships. The GMP planning team also crafted a vision statement for the park which summarizes what the NPS, its partners, and the public would like the park to be like in 2028.

The GMP planning team subsequently considered strategies to address planning issues and concerns and to accomplish the long-term vision for the park. From this emerged four management alternative concepts. Three action alternatives (alternatives 2, 3 and 4) were presented to the public at public meetings in July 2006, and were also made available for comment on the park's website. Many people suggested that they would like to combine aspects of the three action alternatives, notably asking for an alternative that included an emphasis on backcountry preservation and historic resource themes, a through park route, and an emphasis on river gateways and working with communities. The NPS subsequently developed a fourth action alternative (alternative 5) that addressed those concerns.

In the summer of 2007, the GMP planning team circulated a newsletter summarizing the five action alternatives, and hosted a sixth set of meetings to obtain public comment on the revised alternatives. At that time, additional management proposals were presented for public review and comment related to wilderness designation, hunting, and biking in the park. Public comments received at the meetings provided guidance for further refinement of the action alternatives.

In accordance with requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and NPS Management Policies, the GMP planning team evaluated the potential impacts of the alternatives and documented its findings in a draft environmental impact statement. Potential impacts on natural resources, cultural resources, visitor use and experience, park operations, the transportation system, and the socio-economic environment were considered. Potential cumulative impacts were also considered. Overall, alternative 5 was found to provide the greatest number of beneficial impacts in comparison to the other alternatives, while the adverse impacts associated with alternative 5 were generally minor in comparison to the other alternatives.



Local residents participate in public meetings in Fayetteville during development of the GMP. (Photos: WRT/E. Clarke)

The park completed several special studies to inform the planning process for the general management plan:

- Viewshed Analysis
- Archeological Overview and Assessment
- Ethnographic Overview and Assessment
- Natural Resource Assessment
- Vegetation Classification and Mapping
- Climbing Management Plan
- Visitation and Visitor Use Survey
- Wilderness Eligibility Assessment
- Hunting Assessment
- Boundary Adjustment Study
- Assessment of Hunting Impacts at New River Gorge National River

Of the comments received from the public on the Draft GMP/EIS, all but one indicated support for Alternative 5 – Exploration Experiences, as the preferred alternative.

Impact analysis findings were then used to support a Choosing By Advantages (CBA) decision making process to organize and evaluate the facts most relevant to the selection of the preferred alternative and to minimize the influence of individual biases and opinions in the decision making process. Findings of the CBA process determined that alternative 5 would fulfill the statutory mission and responsibilities of the park and would offer a greater overall advantage when compared to the other alternatives considered. Consequently, alternative 5 was selected as the NPS preferred alternative.

In early 2010, the GMP planning team completed and published the *Draft General Management Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Statement – New River Gorge National River (Draft GMP/EIS)*. The public comment period for the document remained open for over 60 days. Approximately 300 interested individuals, agencies, and organizations received either a CD or paper copy of the plan. Copies of the draft plan were also available for review at the park’s visitor centers, at local libraries, and on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website. The NPS hosted three public open houses in March 2010. The GMP planning team reviewed comments received in 77 pieces of correspondence on the draft plan.

Public comments on the *Draft GMP/EIS* indicated strong support for the NPS preferred alternative. The comments required only minor responses and editorial corrections to the *Draft GMP/EIS*. Therefore, an abbreviated format was used for the final plan, and alternative 5 remained the NPS preferred alternative. The *Abbreviated Final GMP/EIS and Foundation Plan for New River Gorge National River* (NPS 2011) was then made available to the public in early 2011. A record of decision selecting alternative 5 as the approved GMP alternative for the park was signed by the NPS Regional Director in December 2011.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The draft and final environmental impact statements accompanying the draft and final general management plans are essentially programmatic statements, presenting an overview of potential impacts relating to each management option. Consultation and coordination with appropriate federal and state agencies occurred throughout preparation of the plan, as appropriate for programmatic statements. In the future, consultation will continue whenever specific undertakings to implement the plan receive funding and move forward into the design process. Follow-up plans will be subject to a more detailed review of environmental impacts than was necessary in the draft and final environmental impact statements accompanying the GMP.

The potential for new development on private land threatens the ability of the NPS to conserve outstanding resources and values in and around the gorge. The public has expressed considerable concern regarding the impacts of new development on these resources and values. Viewshed and natural resource studies indicate extensive areas in the park vicinity where new development – if it should occur in the future – would be visible from the park and would potentially impact the park setting, the visitor experience, and important resource areas. Addition of these areas to the park is impracticable because of potential community impacts and cost.

In lieu of boundary adjustments and land acquisition the NPS will seek to protect park resources from impacts of new development on these lands by working with communities and private landowners. Cooperative actions will focus on land use planning that will encourage sustainable design of new development and that will reduce the impact of new development on scenic values and important resource areas.

Overview of Action Alternatives Considered in the Draft General Management Plan/Draft EIS

Subject	Alternative 2 Themed Gorge Segments	Alternative 3 Through Park Connections	Alternative 4 River Gateways and Rim to River Experiences	Alternative 5 Exploration Experiences (Preferred Alternative)
Visitor Experience General Principle: Park programs would reflect a central theme that helps visitors better understand how the park is organized, the opportunities that are available, and how to travel in the complicated network of local roads and trails in the park's rugged terrain.	Visitor experiences relating to interpretation of cultural resources would be emphasized in themed areas in the north and south ends of the park; primitive recreation would be emphasized in the middle of the park.	Recreation, scenic experiences, and discovery of cultural resources would be emphasized along a new through park connector.	Cultural and recreation resources and experiences would be emphasized in proximity to gateways and along rim to river trails and roads.	Primitive recreation experiences would be emphasized throughout the park along a new through park connector; river gateways and focal areas would be managed for a broad variety of interpretive and recreational experiences.
Natural Resource Management General Principle: Natural processes would dominate in large contiguous forest blocks that support diverse and abundant endemic and rare plant and animal communities.	Throughout the middle of the park large tracts of intact forest would be managed as backcountry (68.5%) with negligible new forest fragmentation.	Only the park's most intact and unfragmented forest tracts – dispersed throughout the park – would be managed as backcountry (43%) with negligible new forest fragmentation.	Large tracts of intact forest removed from river gateways and primary rim to river travel routes would be managed as backcountry (60.8 %) with negligible new forest fragmentation.	Large tracts of intact forest along one or both sides of the New River throughout the park would be managed as backcountry (66.4%) with negligible new forest fragmentation.
Cultural Resource Management General Principle: Successful partnerships would make possible stabilization, rehabilitation, or restoration of the park's most important historic resources; interpretation would occur at restored or rehabilitated cultural resource sites or at discovery sites.	Significant cultural resources in the north and south ends of the park would be restored or rehabilitated and adaptively reused; a few sites in the middle of the park would be managed as discovery sites.	Numerous cultural resources along the through park connector and in the vicinity of visitor facilities would be managed as discovery sites.	Significant cultural resources in the vicinity of river gateways would be rehabilitated and adaptively reused; many sites along rim to river trails and near gateways would be managed as discovery sites.	Significant cultural resources in river gateways and focal areas would be restored or rehabilitated and adaptively reused; many sites along the through park connector would be managed as discovery sites.
Visitor Use and Park Facilities General Principle: Visitor facilities would be programmed and located to support the desired visitor experiences in the park's central theme; they would be designed to have minimal impact on park resources.	<p>Trails would connect major cultural sites in the north and south ends of the park.</p> <p>New visitor facilities would be added in the north and south ends of the park.</p>	<p>The through park connector would connect the park from end to end; other trails would parallel the river.</p> <p>New visitor facilities would be added in the middle of the park.</p>	<p>Trails would connect the rim to the river and provide access to recreation and interpretive sites in the vicinity of river gateways.</p> <p>New visitor facilities would be added in the vicinity of river gateways.</p>	<p>The through park connector would connect the park from end to end; other trails would connect the rim to the river and would provide access to recreation and interpretive sites in the vicinity of river gateways.</p> <p>New facilities would be added in the vicinity of river gateways and in focal areas.</p>
Partnerships and Cooperative Actions General Principle: NPS, gateway communities, and private landowners in the park would work cooperatively to achieve shared goals; partnerships would achieve a seamless network of regional parks, open spaces, trails, and heritage sites in southern West Virginia that supports a vibrant tourism economy.	<p>NPS would provide technical assistance to gateway communities.</p> <p>NPS would expand participation in regional economic development efforts and cooperative efforts with the state parks, public agencies, and visitor use groups.</p>	Same as alternative 2.	<p>NPS and gateway communities would enter into cooperative partnerships.</p> <p>NPS would expand participation in regional economic development efforts and cooperative efforts with the state parks, public agencies, and visitor use groups.</p>	Same as alternative 4.

WILDERNESS DESIGNATION

All lands within the national park system must be evaluated for their eligibility for inclusion in the national wilderness preservation system. The NPS completed the required wilderness eligibility assessment/wilderness study for New River Gorge National River as part of the GMP planning effort (NPS 2009b). Through the wilderness assessment process the GMP planning team identified three areas as potentially eligible for wilderness designation. Most of the park was eliminated from consideration because of existing development. The GMP's third newsletter presented the wilderness options and encouraged people to provide comments. Over 700 written comments were received which were highly polarized concerning wilderness designation, providing feedback as to the extent of alteration and degree of impacts from previous human actions in the areas under consideration. Based upon the wilderness assessment findings and public comments at and following the public meetings, the NPS determined that all parklands within the current park boundary fail to meet the primary wilderness eligibility criteria. This means that park-owned lands within the boundary of New River Gorge National River are not subject to the wilderness preservation provisions and will be managed in accordance with the NPS Organic Act of 1916 and all other laws, executive orders, regulations, and policies applicable to units of the national park system.

Areas Considered for Designation as Potentially Eligible Wilderness

- NPS land within National
- River Limits
- Private land within National
- River Limits

