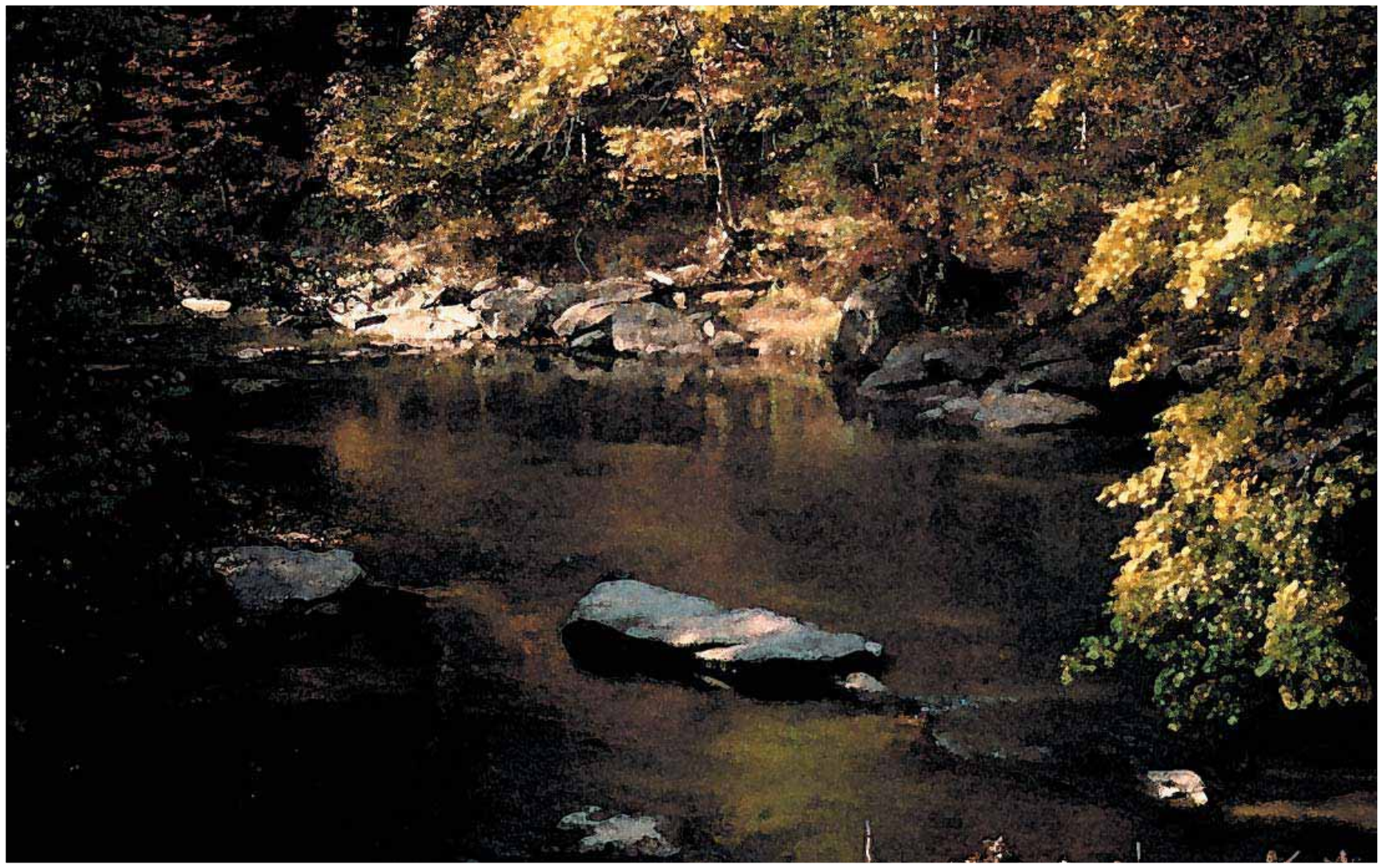




Rock Creek Park and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway



How to Comment on the Plan:

Comments on the *Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement, Rock Creek Park and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway* are welcome and will be accepted for 60 days following publication of notification in the *Federal Register*. You can submit your comments by mail or electronically.

Send written comments to:

National Park Service, Rock Creek Park
Superintendent
3545 Williamsburg Lane NW
Washington, D.C. 20008-1207

You may comment by e-mail by sending comments to: rocr_superintendent@nps.gov

Complete, electronic versions of the *Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement, Rock Creek Park and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway* and its 26-page summary can be reviewed and downloaded as PDF-format files from links at the National Park Service's Rock Creek Park Internet site at:

<http://www.nps.gov/rocr/pphtml/documents.html>

There also is a link at this location through which you can provide comments electronically.

Regardless of how you comment, please include your name and street address with your message. Please submit electronic comments as a text file, avoiding the use of special characters or any form of encryption.

It is National Park Service practice to make comments, including names and addresses of respondents, available for public review. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their address from the record, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law. However, we will not consider anonymous comments. We will make all submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety.



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Purpose of and Need for Action

Introduction

Rock Creek Park and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway are popular units of the national park system that are heavily used by the public. This use places demands on park personnel and facilities to protect resources and maintain a suitable visitor experience. Use and associated demands are expected to increase in the future. A coordinated, integrated plan is required by the National Park Service (NPS) to guide park management in a direction that best meets the multiple demands being placed on the area.

Some of the future visitor experience, natural resource, and cultural resource conditions of the park and parkway are specified in law and policy. Others must be determined through planning. The alternatives in the final general management plan address the resource and experience conditions that are not mandated by law and policy.

Scoping demonstrated that there is much that the public likes about the park. One of the most common comments during scoping was that the park is fine just the way it is today. In particular, people want the traditional character of the park to continue, although many also expressed concern about the effects of traffic on the recreational experience. Another concern is that continued use of some of the park's historic resources as administration offices may compromise their historic integrity.

The central issue for general management planning in Rock Creek Park is how to meet the often conflicting purposes of protecting the scenic, natural, and cultural resources of the park, while concurrently providing for appropriate public use of these resources. This issue is complicated by the location of Rock Creek Park within a major metropolitan area. As a result of its location, the park has many users, some of whom hold widely varying opinions about its optimal use.

The final general management plan will be the basic document for managing Rock Creek Park and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The purposes of the general management plan are to:

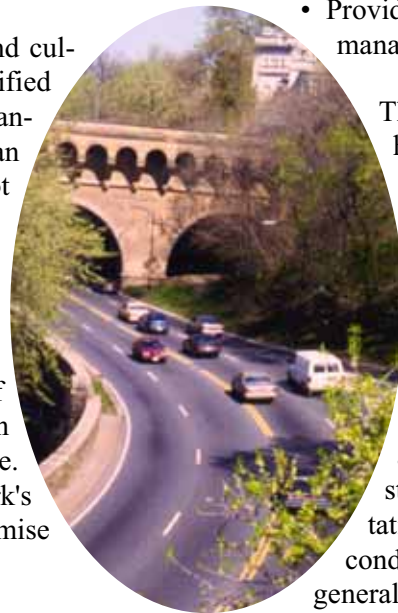
- Specify resource conditions and visitor experiences to be achieved in Rock Creek Park and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway; and
- Provide the basic foundation for decision-making regarding the management of the park and parkway.

The final general management plan will be the first comprehensive plan prepared for Rock Creek Park and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway by the National Park Service. The plan will represent an agreement by the National Park Service with the public on how the park and parkway will be used and managed.

The general management plan does not propose specific actions or describe how particular programs or projects should be ranked or implemented. Those decisions will be addressed during the more detailed planning associated with strategic plans, annual performance plans, and implementation plans. All of those plans will derive from the goals, future conditions, and appropriate types of activities established in the general management plan. As part of that decision-making process, project-specific National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents with opportunities for public review and comment, if appropriate to the project, would be prepared prior to the implementation of any actions included in the general management plan.

Area Covered by the Plan

As shown in the Region map, Rock Creek Park is located in the northern portion of Washington, D.C. It consists primarily of an undeveloped, wooded



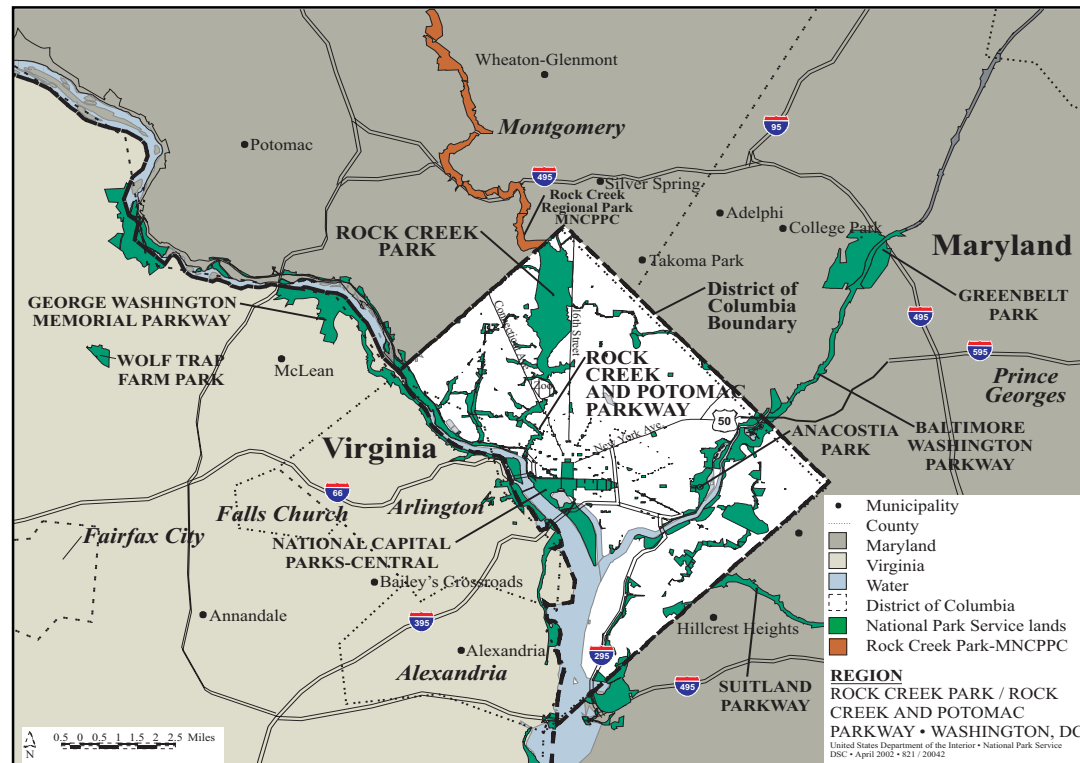
valley, with some associated tributaries and uplands. The major landscape feature is Rock Creek, a perennial stream that flows along the length of the park before joining the Potomac River south of the park. The park is completely surrounded by the heavily urbanized metropolitan Washington, D.C. area.

The area covered by the general management plan includes the lands administered by the National Park Service in the Rock Creek valley from the Maryland state line south to the National Zoo, the 2-mile-long Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway from the National Zoo to Virginia Avenue, and lands along selected tributaries of Rock Creek.

Park and Parkway Purposes

The 1890 legislation that established Rock Creek Park states that the area is to be "perpetually dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasure ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of the United States." It specifies that the park is to "provide for the preservation from injury or spoliation of all timber, animals, or curiosities within said park, and their retention in their natural condition, as nearly as possible." This legislation forms the basis for planning and management of park resources. Rock Creek Park is linked to the Potomac River and the monumental core of Washington, D.C. by the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, which was established by Congress in 1913.

The general management plan includes purpose statements for the park and parkway that were developed based on these units' legislative mandates and on NPS policies. The purpose statements are the most fundamental criteria against which the appropriateness of all recommendations, operational decisions, and actions for the park and parkway are to be tested.



Rock Creek Park exists to:

- Preserve and perpetuate for this and future generations the ecological resources of the Rock Creek valley within the park in as natural a condition as possible, the archeological and historic resources in the park, and the scenic beauty of the park.
- Provide opportunities for the public to experience, understand, and appreciate the park in a manner appropriate to the preservation of its natural and cultural resources.
- Provide opportunities for recreation appropriate to the park's natural and cultural resources.

The Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway exists to:

- Connect Rock Creek Park and the National Zoological Park (National Zoo) to Potomac Park with a scenic road.
- Prevent pollution and obstruction of Rock Creek.

The general management plan also includes several significance statements that help define the park's importance to the nation's natural and cultural heritage. Their purpose is to help managers to make decisions that preserve the resources and values necessary to the park's purposes. The following significance statements recognize the important features of the park and parkway.

- Rock Creek Park is one of the oldest and largest naturally managed urban parks in the United States.

- The park and parkway contains approximately 2,100 acres of valuable plant and wildlife habitat, providing protection for a variety of native species within a heavily urbanized area.



- Rock Creek Park encompasses a rugged stream valley of exceptional scenic beauty with forested, natural landscapes and intimate natural details, in contrast to the surrounding cityscape of Washington, D.C.



- Rock Creek Park's forests and open spaces help define the character of the nation's capital.



- Rock Creek valley was important in the early history of the region and in the development of the nation's capital, and the park's cultural resource are among the few tangible remains of the area's past.

- Rock Creek Park is an oasis for urban dwellers, offering respite from the bustle of the city.



- The Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway is the first federally constructed parkway and one of the best examples of early parkway design.

- The Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway provides a scenic gateway to the city's monumental core.



- Rock Creek Park is a historic designed landscape incorporating early 20th century picturesque and rustic features designed to enhance the visitors' experience of the naturalistic park scenery.



- Located in the heart of a densely populated cosmopolitan area, Rock Creek Park serves as an ambassador for the national park idea, providing outstanding opportunities for education, interpretation, and recreation to foster stewardship of natural and cultural resources.



Servicewide Mandates and Policies

As with all NPS units, management of the park and parkway is guided by numerous congressional acts and executive orders, in addition to the establishing legislation. Some of these laws and executive orders are applicable primarily to units of the national park system. Others have broad application, such as the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and executive orders addressing the protection of wetlands and floodplains.

The alternatives considered in the general management plan all incorporate and comply with the provisions of these mandates and policies. In addition to the approaches specified in the final general management plan, the National Park Service will strive to implement all of the servicewide mandates and policies in the park and parkway. As a result, the general management plan does not state, for instance, that the National Park Service will

continue to protect endangered species, control invasive plants and animals, improve water quality, protect archeological sites, preserve historic structures, and provide access for citizens with disabilities.

The Organic Act created the National Park Service in 1916. This act defines the NPS' mission to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life [in national parks, monuments, and reservations] and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." Thus, any management actions in Rock Creek Park must recognize that preserving scenery and the natural and cultural resources of the park is paramount, and that any visitor activities associated with enjoyment can occur only to the extent that they do not impair the scenery and the natural and cultural resources for future generations.

Most of the Rock Creek watershed is outside of the park. Therefore, a key activity will involve continued coordination with other agencies throughout the region to improve conditions in Rock Creek and its tributaries. This will include such continuing actions as supporting the Chesapeake Bay Program; working with the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority to eliminate discharges of untreated sewage to the creek, either from pipe breaks or from overflow during storm events from combined sanitary and storm sewer systems; and working with upstream agencies and property owners to reduce volumes of storm water runoff.

Current Use

It is estimated that Rock Creek Park supports more than 2 million recreational visits per year. Most visitors are residents of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

- Developed facilities include the Rock Creek Nature Center and Planetarium, the Peirce Mill complex, the 4,000-seat Carter Barron Amphitheater, two nine-hole golf courses, picnic areas, community gardens, horseback riding facilities, and sport fields.

- Biking, jogging, walking, and in-line skating are popular activities on the park's roads and paved trails, particularly on weekends when several road segments are closed to motorized vehicles. Driving for pleasure also occurs, particularly along the length of Beach Drive.



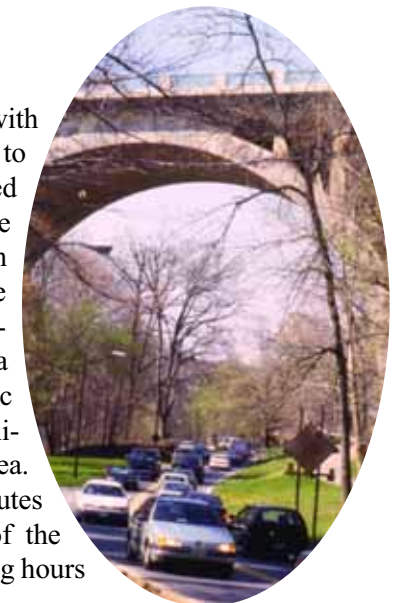
- The forests on the valley slopes and ridge tops are used for hiking and provide opportunities for solitude and nature study.



In addition, the park experiences more than 9 million nonrecreational visits annually. These visits primarily involve the use of park roads to travel between destinations outside the park without stopping in the park.

Current Traffic Management

Park roads were established to comply with the establishing legislation's instructions to "lay out and prepare roadways . . . to be used for driving." Together, Beach Drive and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, which run alongside Rock Creek from the Maryland state line to Virginia Avenue, provide a north-south route that has become a popular commuting road. Weekday traffic on Beach Drive averages about 6,600 vehicles per day through the scenic gorge area. Several park roads provide east-west routes across the park. More than 95 percent of the vehicles entering the park during commuting hours pass through without stopping.



Approximately 55,000 vehicles per day typically use the busiest portion of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. The National Park Service manages traffic on weekdays by making the parkway one-way inbound into the city

during the morning rush-hour and one-way outbound from the city during the afternoon rush-hour.

Current management practices include closing portions of Beach Drive and other park roads to motorized vehicles on weekends and holidays. These closures provide recreation opportunities that are unmatched elsewhere in the District of Columbia and are very popular with park visitors. Therefore, all of the alternatives for future management of the park will continue the practice of weekend and holiday road closures.

Decision Points

Decision points are major resource condition and visitor experience issues that need to be addressed in the general management plan. Decision points were identified by the general public, park staff, and other agencies during scoping for the general management plan.

A pivotal management issue to be resolved by the plan involves the use of park roads. This issue includes determining the level of nonrecreational traffic in Rock Creek Park and the degree to which park values would be affected by such use. Two other key management issues include the currently limited ability to provide orientation, interpretation, and education services to visitors in the park, and the problems that park administrative and operations activities encounter at their present locations in historic structures.

These key management issues are summarized in three questions, called decision points. The decision points helped define the management alternatives that are described and evaluated in the general management plan. The decision points ask:

- How should traffic be managed in Rock Creek Park and on the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway?
- What are the most appropriate levels of service and locations for visitor interpretation and education in the park?
- What are the most appropriate locations to support administration and operations functions with respect to minimizing resource disturbance?

Items not Covered in the General Management Plan

The general management plan does not include the Rock Creek Tennis Stadium and adjoining playing fields. Management direction for this area was established in 1995 in the *Final Environmental Impact Statement, Tennis Stadium, Rock Creek Park*.

The general management plan does not address concerns identified during scoping that are already prescribed by law, regulation, or policy, or that would be in violation of such requirements. It also does not address issues that are at an operational or developmental level of detail. Such issues are most appropriately associated with the park's 5-year strategic plan or annual implementation plans. Those plans will be based on the resource conditions and visitor experiences to be achieved in the park and parkway that are established in the final general management plan.

During scoping and in comments on the draft general management plan, the National Park Service received many suggestions for park and parkway management that were not incorporated into any of the alternatives. Many of these suggestions are more appropriate for the shorter-term management documents that will tier from this final general management plan, and will be included in 5-year strategic plans, annual performance plans, and implementation plans. Descriptions of the types of suggestions and the reasons they were not incorporated into any of the alternatives are included in the general management plan in the section entitled "Alternatives or Actions Eliminated from Further Study."

Public Participation

The National Park Service considers the public a key participant in planning for Rock Creek Park and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Therefore, public involvement has been an important component of the planning process. The "Consultation and Coordination" section of the general management plan and environmental impact statement describes public participation to date. As described in the "Next Steps" section of this summary, the National Park Service will continue to partner with the public to develop and implement the plan for managing the park and parkway.

