

(Cover page)

National parks are among the most remarkable collection of places in America for recreation, learning and inspiration. Interpretive programs are the methods the Service uses to connect people to their parks, with opportunities for all visitors to form their own intellectual, emotional, and physical connections to the meanings and values found in the parks' stories. Facilitating those opportunities through effective interpretive and educational programs will encourage the development of a personal stewardship ethic and broaden public support for preserving and protecting park resources.

## Chapter 7 Interpretation and Education

### Introduction

The Organic Act of 1916 created the National Park Service to conserve park resources and "provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for future generations." The purpose of NPS interpretive and educational programs is to advance this mission by providing memorable educational and recreational experiences that will (1) help the public understand the meaning and relevance of park resources, and (2) foster development of a sense of stewardship. The programs do so by forging a connection between park resources, visitors, the community, and the national park system. That connection is made by linking a park's tangible resources to the intangible values and meanings found in those resources. An important outcome of the park experience is that visitors more readily retain information, grasp meanings, and adopt new behaviors and values because they are directly involved with cultural and natural heritage resources and sites.

As a result of technological advances, people can "visit" a national park and connect with park resources at their convenience. Hence, for purposes of this chapter, the terms "visitor" and "park visitor" are defined as anyone who uses a park's interpretive and education services, regardless of where such use occurs.

The Service will maintain the organizational capability to deliver visitor and interpretive services of the highest quality. Those services should provide understandable interpretation of the major features in the parks and the events that occurred there, with an emphasis on experiences that will lead visitors to appreciate the park's authentic qualities. Excellent and effective interpretation and education will be the shared responsibility of all levels of NPS staff and partners. This will include everyone, from the Washington and regional directorates, through park superintendents and chief interpreters, to field interpreters, non-interpretive staff, and partners. Excellence in interpretation and education will be achieved through specific visitor activities, interpretive media, ongoing scholarly research, planning, technical excellence in implementation, broad public input, continual reevaluation, sound business practices, and training to professional standards all who provide interpretive services.

Enjoyment of the parks is a fundamental part of the visitor experience. That experience is heightened when it progresses from enjoyment to an understanding of the reasons for a park's

existence and the significance of its resources. In order to determine the quality and quantity of the visitor experience, levels of visitor satisfaction, safety, understanding, and appreciation will be measured. Director's Order #6 and Reference Manual 6 provide additional guidance for the development of interpretive and educational programs.

## **7.1 Interpretive and Educational Programs**

Since the National Park Service's inception, one of the chief functions of the national parks has been to serve educational purposes. The NPS is committed to extend its leadership in education, to build on what is in place and to pursue new relationships and opportunities to make national parks even more meaningful in the life of the nation. Within the rich learning environments of national parks, and facilitated by NPS interpreters, visitors will be offered authentic experiences and opportunities to immerse themselves in places where events actually happened; experience the thrill of connecting with real objects used by previous generations; enjoy some of the most beautiful and historic places in America; and understand the difficult moments our nation has endured.

Every park will develop an interpretive and educational program that is grounded in (1) park resources, (2) themes related to the park's legislative history and significance, and (3) park and Service-wide mission goals. The intent will be to provide each visitor with an interpretive experience that is enjoyable and inspirational, within the context of the park's tangible resources and the meanings they represent. In addition, visitors should be made aware of the purposes and scope of the national park system.

Interpretation will encourage dialogue, and accept that visitors have their own individual points of view. Factual information presented will be current, accurate, based on current scholarship and science, and delivered so as to convey park meanings, with the understanding that audience members will draw their own conclusions. Interpretation will also reach out to park neighbors, those segments of the population that do not visit national parks, and community decision-makers to stimulate discussions about the park and its meanings in local, regional, and national contexts. In addition, interpretive services will help park employees better understand the park's history, resources, processes, and visitors.

An effective park interpretive and educational program will include:

- *Informational and orientation programs* that provide visitors with easy access to the information they need to have a safe and enjoyable park experience.
- *Interpretive programs* that provide both on- and off-site presentations, and are designed to encourage visitors to form their own intellectual or emotional connections with the resource. Interpretive programs facilitate a connection between the interests of visitors and the meanings of the park.
- *Curriculum-based educational programs* that link park themes to national standards and state curricula, and involve educators in planning and development. These programs include pre-visit and post-visit materials, address different learning styles, include an evaluation mechanism, and provide learning experiences linked directly to clear objectives. Programs develop a thorough understanding of a park's resources in individual, regional, national, and global contexts, and the park's place within the national park system.

- *Interpretive media* that provide visitors with relevant park information, and facilitate more in-depth understanding of—and personal connection with—park stories and resources. This media will be continually maintained for both quality of content and condition based upon established standards.

(See *Air Quality* 4.7.; *Geologic Resource Management* 4.8; *Wilderness Interpretation and Education* 6.4.2; *Energy Management* 9.1.7; *Visitor Facilities* 9.3. Also see *Director's Order* #7: *Interpretation and Education*)

## **7.2 Interpretive Planning**

General management plans and comprehensive interpretive plans (CIPs) will serve as the backbone of interpretive and educational program planning and direction. The CIP process will guide park staff in defining themes, determining desired visitor experience opportunities, identifying challenges, and recommending which stories to tell, how to tell them, and how to reach specific audiences. All interpretive and educational services, including personal services, interpretive media, and partnerships that work to support the delivery of interpretive and educational programs, will be based on, and coordinated with, the CIP. The resulting park-wide interpretation and education program thus will communicate park significance and meanings in the most effective and efficient way. Recognition that concessioners, cooperating associations, friends groups, and other partners may have an important role in providing interpretive and educational services will be most important in planning for the overall visitor services program, and such entities should be included where appropriate in the planning process.

Park superintendents will initiate the CIP process. The life span of a CIP will be seven to ten years. Superintendents and chiefs of interpretation will be accountable to ensure that their parks have a completed and current CIP as defined in *Director's Order* #6 and *Reference Manual* 6. Harpers Ferry Center and regional offices will provide support.

(See also *Director's Order* #75A: *Civic Engagement and Public Involvement*)

## **7.3 Personal and Non-personal Services**

### **7.3.1 Personal Services**

Personal interpretive services are those which feature contacts with visitors. Anyone who works in a park and makes contact with the public can and should provide an enjoyable, appropriate and valuable visitor service. Superintendents and chiefs of interpretation will demand quality in the delivery of a multi-dimensional personal services program by park staff, volunteers, contractors, cooperating associations, concessioners, and other partners. In addition to basic information and orientation services, personal interpretive services can include walks, talks, tours, campfire programs, roving contacts, curriculum-based education programs, and Junior Ranger programs. These types of activities and programs will be designed to offer opportunities for greater enjoyment and in-depth understanding and appreciation of the park's resources.

Personal services will strive to connect diverse audiences to parks and nurture future stewards of America's national heritage. Park staff should be able to help visitors obtain a safe, meaningful

and satisfying park experience, help them decide how to spend their time in the park, and inform them about the wonders that await their discovery. Personal services programs presented in parks will be recorded annually in the Service-wide Interpretive Report (SIR), which will document the number of programs offered, visitors served and the costs associated with those programs. Park chiefs of interpretation will be responsible for submitting their park's portion of the SIR to the WASO Division of Interpretation and Education.

#### **7.3.1.1 Curriculum-based Education Programs**

Parks will be managed as places to demonstrate the principles of biology, to illustrate the national experience as history, to engage learners throughout their lifetimes, and to do these things while challenging visitors in exciting and motivating settings. Schools represent a microcosm of society and present myriad opportunities for the Service to foster stewardship in future generations. Therefore, curriculum-based programs will be designed to link classroom learning with experiences in the parks. Programs will complement school curricula by matching a group's educational objectives with park resources. Curriculum-based programs will focus on the stories and meanings attached to park resources, the impacts affecting the condition of those resources, conservation or preservation issues relevant to the park, the national park system, and the park's place within that system. To continue to meet the demand from schools for NPS programs, parks will identify, in cooperation with park partners, alternative means for program delivery, such as publications, Internet deliveries, and distance learning.

#### **7.3.2 Non-personal Services**

Non-personal services are interpretive media (publications such as a unigrid brochure or park newspaper, film, exhibits, web based programs). They do not require the presence of staff. Non-personal services, which can reach large audiences, must maintain a consistent quality of presentation over time. Used in conjunction with personal services, they will provide opportunities for visitor information, orientation, and for personal connections to park resources. The Center for Media Services will establish Service-wide standards for all NPS informational media.

HFC will also provide guidance and assistance to parks for interpretive media planning, design and production for museum and visitor center exhibits, wayside exhibits, audiovisual productions, publications, and directional signage. Plans or proposals to be accomplished by parks and regions, including privately funded projects, may be reviewed by The Center for Media Services for appropriateness and quality of design and execution. Proposals from concessioners, cooperating associations, and others may also be reviewed. To provide data for parks to maintain these assets, the condition of the NPS inventory of exhibits and interpretive trails (currently recorded in the Media Inventory Database System, or MIDS) will be tracked through the Facilities Maintenance Management System.

Parks will be responsible for the conservation of historic furnishings and artifacts on exhibit in parks. They may obtain conservation services from the Center for Media Services or from outside contractors.

### 7.3.2.1 Park Brochures

Official park brochures are an important part of the National Park Service identity and a valuable and desired part of the park experience. Each brochure should provide a map of the park, address critical safety and resource protection issues, and describe significant park resources. The Service's goal will be that 100% of parks have an adequate allotment of park brochures to meet demands from visitation with a 1 to 9 ratio, and also ensure that appropriate and adequate numbers of brochures are available in other languages as needed.

### 7.3.3 Technology and Interpretation

Innovative use of existing and emerging technology can maximize both the visitor experience and employee effectiveness. Parks should use technological communications, such as the Internet and distance learning, to enhance their informational, orientation, interpretive, and educational programs. The National Park Service will maintain a site on the World Wide Web (nps.gov) to provide an opportunity for all parks and programs to reach beyond their borders to a world-wide audience. Nps.gov is the busiest visitor center in the National Park Service. Each park will maintain a home page for the purpose of reaching this audience. Parks will be encouraged to link from their home pages to web pages of entities that support the mission of the NPS. Park home pages will comply with Director's Order #11C: Web Publishing.

Technology serves the learning styles and lifestyles of many park visitors and potential visitors. Visitors can be expected to continue using new technological tools to access information most important to them. Technological tools provide outstanding opportunities for park-related orientation, information, and in-depth learning—thus leading to an improved visitor experience that fosters connection with and stewardship of the parks.

### 7.3.4 Interpretive and Educational Services Beyond Park Boundaries

The Service will continually adjust to changing patterns of visitation and an increasingly multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural society to ensure that the national park system remains high among societal concerns and relevant to future generations. Each park's interpretation and education program will reach out to park neighbors, those who are not visiting national parks, and community decision-makers to stimulate discussions about the park and its values in local, regional, and national contexts. Parks will use community programs and special events such as pageants, anniversaries, dedications, festivals, and other observances as opportunities to highlight meaningful connections between the park, its resources, the event, and the public. These activities, as well as other interpretive and educational services, support civic engagement and contribute to public understanding of the park's significance and the significance of the national park system.

Outreach services are an important part of a balanced visitor services program. Interpretation and education must explore new and innovative approaches to meet the needs of a diverse constituency, many of whom may never set foot inside a park's boundaries. A planned outreach program will be employed to firmly establish each park as part of the local, national, and global community. Outreach will be used to disseminate park information and interpretive and

educational programs beyond park boundaries. Everyone should have the opportunity to connect to the parks through NPS outreach services.

#### **7.4 Interpretive Competencies and Skills**

All interpretive services should be provided by highly trained personnel who have access to a continual supply of current information from research programs and other sources. All employees who provide interpretive services will be required to meet the NPS's national standards of interpretation and education. To support that effort the Service will develop a web-based distance learning and credentialing platform based on the Interpretive Development Program (IDP), to teach interpretive and educational skills and competencies and test for knowledge of those skills and competencies.

National Park Service interpretation and education employees will be held to the most comprehensive standards and act as models and coaches for other NPS staff especially law enforcement, volunteers, and other partners. Partners (including cooperating associations, contractors, and concessioners) will have access to, and be required to meet, NPS national standards in the competency areas in which they work. Those who give formal programs will meet the appropriate national standards for such competencies. The cooperating association standard agreement, concession contracts, and other contracts that include interpretive services will require the demonstration of standards. Similarly, contractors for media projects will use the web-based distance learning and credentialing platform to both learn about National Park Service requirements and demonstrate their mastery of required standards. Permanent interpreters and seasonal interpreters will be required to certify in relevant and park-appropriate interpretive competencies of the IDP. The certification will be designed to establish a consistent Service-wide professional standard and to fortify the full-performance interpretive ranger as a provider of interpretive services while also serving as standard bearer, coach, mentor, and facilitator for all others who provide those services.

#### **7.5 Requirements for All Interpretive and Educational Services**

The following factors must be considered in the development and review of all personal and non-personal services:

##### **7.5.1 Interpretation and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Relevancy**

Demographic trends in American indicate an ever increasing array of diversity within the population. The National Park Service must change its traditional approach of interpretation to improve relevancy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to our visitors. To enact this change the National Park Service will implement new and innovative ways to reach out, engage, and cultivate the support of the increasingly diverse array of visitors. The unique qualities of the national parks—qualities that highlight, for example, America's diverse heritage and the principles of democracy—are what make them relevant. These qualities will be used to advantage in educating Americans, and visitors to America, about the civic experience of our country and the complex, diverse ecology of our nation and the world. Interpretation and education will seek to provide opportunities for more national park audiences to have experiences that connect them to parks, so that they will



come to value these special places. The national park system and the Interpretation and Education program provide an opportunity for facilitation of civic dialog to engage Americans to be involved in understanding past and current issues of importance on a local-to-global basis. This opportunity should be exploited.

### **7.5.2 Access to Interpretive and Educational Opportunities**

National parks belong to all of the nation's people. All should have opportunities to enjoy them.

Efforts will be made to ensure that interpretive and educational programs are available to all people and take into consideration the special needs of children, senior citizens, non-English speaking visitors, and the economically disadvantaged. Foreign-language translations of park publications will be provided in those parks visited by substantial numbers of non-English-speaking visitors.

The National Park Service will also ensure that persons with disabilities receive the same interpretive opportunities as those without disabilities. Interpretive and educational programs, exhibits, publications, and all other interpretive media will comply with Department of the Interior regulations at 43 CFR Part 17, subpart E, and with standards required by the Architectural Barriers Act. Accordingly, the Park Service will ensure that persons with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in all programs and activities in the most integrated setting appropriate. Additionally, the Service will take all feasible steps to ensure effective communication with individuals with hearing, visual and cognitive disabilities. These steps should include but not be limited to providing sign-language interpreters, audio/visual presentations, Braille, and large-print versions of printed materials.

*(See Physical Access for Persons with Disabilities 5.3.2; Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities 8.2.4; Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities 9.1.2; Accessibility of Commercial Services 10.2.6.2. Also see Director's Order #42; Reference Manual 41; 43 CFR 17.550)*

### **7.5.3 Resource Issue Interpretation and Education**

Park managers are increasingly called upon to make difficult resource decisions, some of which may be highly controversial. Interpretation and education programs can provide opportunities for civic engagement with residents and officials of gateway and neighboring communities, the region, and the state(s) surrounding a park and beyond. Such opportunities for civic dialogue about resource issues and broad initiatives are often the most effective means for eliminating resource threats and gaining input and feedback from stakeholder constituents. Therefore, parks should, in balanced and appropriate ways, thoroughly integrate resource issues and initiatives of local and Service-wide importance into their interpretive and educational programs. Whenever possible, the appropriate interpretive managers at the national, regional, or park level should be involved in the process.

In instances in which programming affects resources managed by other agencies, such agencies should be consulted during program planning. For resource issue interpretation to be effective, frontline interpretive staff must be informed about the reasoning that guided the decision-making process, and interpreters must present balanced views. Acknowledging multiple points of view does not require interpretive and educational programs to provide equal time, or to disregard the weight of scientific or historical evidence. Resource issue interpretation should be integrated into

both on- and off-site programs, as well as into printed and electronic media whenever deemed appropriate by the park manager.

#### **7.5.4 Research and Scholarship**

Interpretive and educational programs will be based on current scholarship and research about the history, science, and condition of park resources, and on research about the needs, expectations, and behavior of visitors. To accomplish this, a dialogue must be established and maintained among interpreters, education specialists, resource managers, scientists, archeologists, sociologists, ethnographers, historians, and other experts, for the purpose of offering the most current and accurate programs to the public. When appropriate parks are encouraged to utilize a 'master interpreter' to foster, facilitate, and maintain this dialogue. (*See Levels of Park Planning 2.3*)

#### **7.5.5 Evaluation of Interpretation and Education Effectiveness**

Evaluation is also critically important for continuous improvement of educational and interpretative programs that lead to achievement of the NPS mission. Evaluation, systematically applied, is necessary to ensure that the NPS Interpretation and Education Program is cost-effective and financially accountable. The NPS will maintain an evaluation strategy that fosters a Service-wide commitment to program planning and reflection, information sharing, and application of research-based results.

#### **7.5.6 Consultation**

The National Park Service will present factual and balanced presentations of the many American cultures, heritages, and histories. Diverse constituencies will be consulted to (1) ensure appropriate content and accuracy, and (2) identify multiple points of view and potentially sensitive issues. When appropriate, state and local agencies involved in heritage tourism and history (such as state historic preservation officers) should be included in consultations to foster coordination and partnerships. Acknowledging multiple points of view does not require interpretive and educational programs to provide equal time, or to disregard the weight of scientific or historical evidence.

Park managers will take culturally sensitive steps to preserve the knowledge of traditionally associated peoples and secure the benefit of their deep understanding of the nature and spirit of places within the parks by encouraging their participation in park activities. A related goal will be to ensure that irreplaceable connections such as place names, migration routes, harvesting practices, prayers and songs are cataloged for use in current and future activities.

The Service will respectfully consult traditionally associated peoples and other cultural and community groups in the planning, development, presentation, and operation of park interpretive programs and media relating to their cultures and histories. Cooperative programs will be developed with tribal governments and cultural groups to help the NPS present accurate perspectives on their cultures. Ethnographic or cultural anthropological data and concepts will also be used in interpretive programs.



The Service will not display Native American human remains or photographs of those remains. Drawings, renderings, or casts of such remains will not be displayed without the consent of culturally affiliated Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations. The Service may exhibit non-Native American remains, photographs, drawings, renderings, or casts thereof, in consultation with appropriate traditionally associated peoples. The Service will consult with culturally affiliated or traditionally associated peoples to determine the religious status of any object whose sacred nature is suspected but not confirmed. These consultations will occur before an object is exhibited or any action is taken that may have an adverse effect on its religious qualities.

*(See Evaluation and Categorization 5.1.3.2; Stewardship of Human Remains and Burials 5.3.4; Ethnographic Resources 5.3.5.3; Museum Collections 5.3.5.5)*

#### **7.5.7 Cultural Demonstrators**

Cultural demonstrators can provide unique insights into their cultures. In order to facilitate their successful interaction with the public, parks may provide cultural demonstrators with training and direction. Cultural demonstrators (in parks outside the National Capital Region) who are not NPS employees may be permitted to sell self-made handcraft items to park visitors, keeping the proceeds for themselves, where such handcrafts are related to the park's interpretive themes. This is allowed under 16 USC 1a-2(g), which authorizes the sale of products produced in the conduct of living exhibits, interpretive demonstrations, or park programs. When this practice is permitted, all materials used in creating such items must be the private property of the demonstrator, collected from outside the park. The superintendent may permit this practice through a cooperative agreement, special use permit, concession contract, or other legal instrument.

Titles 8 and 13 of ANILCA regulate the taking of fish, wildlife, and other natural resources for subsistence and other purposes in the Alaska parks.

*(See Reenactments 7.5.8; Special Events 8.6.2; Collecting Natural Products 8.8; Merchandise 10.2.4.5. Also see 36 CFR 5.3; 60 FR 17639)*

#### **7.5.8 Historic Weapons**

All uses of historic weapons in parks will strictly comply with the Historic Weapons Demonstrations Safety Standards contained in Reference Manual 6, and will follow the procedures specified therein for the particular weapon(s) being used.

Weapons firing demonstrations conducted in areas administered by the NPS are restricted to reproduction black powder weapons only. Original NPS museum weapons will not be used. Requests by outside groups or individuals to use non-NPS original weapons will follow the exemption request procedure prescribed in Reference Manual 6, and will be granted or denied in writing by the superintendent.

#### **7.5.9 Reenactments**

Battle reenactments and demonstrations of battle tactics that involve exchanges of fire between opposing lines, the taking of casualties, hand-to-hand combat, or any other form of simulated warfare, are prohibited in all parks. Even the best-researched and most well-intentioned representation of combat cannot replicate the tragic complexity of real warfare. Respect for the memory of those whose lives were lost at these sites and whose unrecovered remains are often still interred in these grounds precludes the staging of inherently artificial battles at these memorial sites. Battle reenactments create an atmosphere inconsistent with the memorial qualities of the battlefields and other military sites placed in the Service's trust. The safety risks to participants and visitors, and the inevitable damage to the physical resource which occurs during such events are also unacceptably high when viewed in light of the NPS mandate to preserve and protect park resources and values.

## **7.6 Interpretive and Educational Partnerships**

The National Park Service will increase the effectiveness and accountability of park interpretation and education activities by collaborating with volunteers, cooperating associations, concessioners and other partners to provide interpretive and educational services that adhere to Service-wide standards. To be successful, this will require all NPS interpretation and education practitioners, employees and partners, personal service providers, and media professionals to have access to training, coaching, and program evaluation results—that meet national standards. National Park Service interpreters and educators will provide the leadership, example, and standards for all partners to deliver effective interpretation and education services.

Interpretation and education operational capacity will be improved in parks by actively pursuing additional partnerships. Partnerships for this purpose will be sought with willing and able organizations with compatible purposes, such as historical societies, museums, colleges and universities, school districts, tourism commissions, conservation groups, health organizations, libraries, and others.

### **7.6.1 Volunteers in Parks (VIP)**

Interpretation and education operational capacity will be increased in parks by actively pursuing volunteers and dedicating NPS staff time to coordinate volunteer programs in parks. While the bulk of volunteer hours support interpretation and education, volunteer services may be used in various aspects of park operation under the authority of the Volunteers in the Parks Act of 1969. Pursuant to this legislation, volunteers may be recruited without regard to civil service regulations; are covered for tort liability and work-injury compensation; and may be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses while participating in the program. Volunteers will be accepted without regard to race, creed, religion, age, sex, color, national origin, disability, or sexual orientation. Volunteers will not displace NPS employees. NPS housing may be used for volunteers only if available and not needed for NPS employees. Director's Order #7 and Reference Manual 7 provide additional guidance for the volunteer program.

*(See Protection 5.3.5.1.3; Housing Management Plans 9.4.3.1. Also see Handbook 36 on Housing)*

### 7.6.2 Cooperating Associations

The National Park Service will continue to nurture its relationship with nonprofit organizations that support park programs. Cooperating associations may provide publications and other items that enhance the interpretive story, allow visitors to explore particular interests, and enable them to take the park story home through their purchases.

When appropriate, cooperating associations will join the National Park Service in presenting interpretive and educational programs, and in supporting research efforts as authorized in 16 USC 1-3, 6, and 17j-(2)e. In accordance with the standard, non-negotiable cooperating association agreement, cooperating associations may, consistent with a park's scope-of-sales statement, purchase for re-sale, or produce for sale, interpretive and educational items that are directly related to the understanding and interpretation of the park or the national park system. Associations may offer appropriate and approved interpretive services that support but do not supplant interpretive and educational services offered by the NPS. Associations may accept donations on behalf of the Service when appropriate, and when conducted through approved fundraising efforts. Service housing may be used for cooperating association employees only if available and not needed for NPS employees. Guidance for managing NPS partnerships with cooperating associations is included in Director's Order #32 and Reference Manual 32.

*(See Housing Management Plans 9.4.3.4. Also see Director's Order #21: Donations and Fundraising; Handbook 36 on Housing)*

1 [This page intentionally left blank]