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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The controlling definitions for terms under the President's Council on Environmental Quality National Environmental Policy Act regulations are contained at 40 Code of Federal Regulations; the numbers in parentheses refer to the appropriate section. These definitions are provided as a supplement to those regulatory definitions.

**Access** — a way or means of approaching. Access may or may not be a road.

**Appropriate use** — a use that is suitable, proper, or fitting for a particular park, or to a particular location within a park.

**Archeological resource** — any material remains or physical evidence of past human life or activities which are of archeological interest, including the record of the effects of human activities on the environment.

An archeological resource is capable of revealing scientific or humanistic information through archeological research.

**Carrying capacity** — the maximum population of a particular species that a particular region can support without hindering future generations' ability to maintain the same population. A visitor, or user, carrying capacity is the type and level of use that can be accommodated while sustaining the desired resource and visitor experience conditions.

**Categorical exclusion** (1508.4)—an action with no measurable environmental impact which is described in one of the categorical exclusion lists in section 3-3 or 3-4 and for which no exceptional circumstances (section 3-5) exist.

**Climate** — in a narrow sense is usually defined as the "average weather," or more rigorously, as the statistical description in terms of the mean and variability of 13 relevant quantities over a period of time ranging from months to thousands or 14 millions of years. The classical period is 30 years, as defined by the World 15 Meteorological Organization. These quantities are most often surface variables such 16 as temperature, precipitation, and wind. Climate in a wider sense is the state, 17 including a statistical description, of the

climate system.

**Climate change** — refers to a statistically significant variation in either the mean state of 20 the climate or in its variability, persisting for an extended period (typically decades or 21 longer). Climate change may be due to natural internal processes or external 22 forcings, or to persistent anthropogenic changes in the composition of the atmosphere 23 or in land use.

**Connected actions** (1508.25) — actions that are closely related. They automatically trigger other actions that have environmental impacts, they cannot or will not proceed unless other actions have been taken previously or simultaneously, or they are interdependent parts of a larger action and/or depend on the larger action for their justification.

**Conservation planning and impact assessment** — within the National Park Service, this process is synonymous with the National Environmental Policy Act process. This process evaluates alternative courses of action and impacts so that decisions are made in accord with the conservation and preservation mandate of the NPS Organic Act.

**Conserve** — to protect from loss or harm; preserve. Historically, the terms conserve, protect, and preserve have come collectively to embody the fundamental purpose of the NPS— preserving, protecting and conserving the national park system.

**Cooperating agency** (1508.5) — a federal agency other than the one preparing the National Environmental Policy Act document (lead agency) that has jurisdiction over the proposal by virtue of law or special expertise and that has been deemed a cooperating agency by the lead agency. State or local governments, and/or Indian tribes, may be designated cooperating agencies as appropriate (see 1508.5 and 1502.6).

**Critical habitat** — specific areas within a geographical area occupied by a threatened or endangered species which contain those physical or biological features essential to the conservation of the species, and

which may require special management considerations or protection; and specific areas outside the geographical area occupied by the species at the time of its listing, upon a determination by the Secretary of the Interior that such areas are essential for the conservation of the species. (See 16 USC 1342)

**Cultural resources** (NPS-28, appendix A) — aspects of a cultural system that are valued by or significantly representative of a culture or that contain significant information about a culture. A cultural resource may be a tangible entity or a cultural practice. Tangible cultural resources are categorized as districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects for the National Register of Historic Places, and as archeological resources, cultural landscapes, prehistoric and historic structures, museum objects, and ethnographic resources for NPS management purposes.

**Cultural landscape** — a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with a historic event, activity, or person, or exhibiting other cultural or esthetic values. There are four non-mutually exclusive types of cultural landscapes: historic sites, historic designed landscapes, historic vernacular landscapes, and ethnographic landscapes.

**Cumulative actions** (1508.25) — actions that, when viewed with other actions in the past, the present, or the reasonably foreseeable future, regardless of who has undertaken or will undertake them, have an additive impact on the resource the proposal would affect.

**Cumulative impact** (1508.7) — the impacts of cumulative actions.

**Desired conditions** — a park's natural and cultural resource conditions that the NPS aspires to achieve and maintain over time, and the conditions necessary for visitors to understand, enjoy, and appreciate those resources. These conditions are identified through a park's planning process.

**Developed area** — an area managed to provide and maintain facilities (e.g., roads, campgrounds, housing) serving visitors and

park management functions. Includes areas where park development or intensive use may have substantially altered the natural environment or the setting for culturally significant resources.

**Direct effect** (1508.8) — an impact that occurs as a result of the proposal or alternative in the same place and at the same time as the action.

**Environmental assessment (EA)** (1508.9) — a brief National Environmental Policy Act document that is prepared to (a) help determine whether the impact of a proposal or alternatives could be significant; (b) aid the National Park Service in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act by evaluating a proposal that will have no significant impacts, but that may have measurable adverse impacts; or (c) evaluate a proposal that either is not described on the list of categorically excluded actions, or is on the list but exceptional circumstances (section 3-5) apply.

**Environmental impact statement** (1508.11) — a detailed National Environmental Policy Act document that is prepared when a proposal or alternatives have the potential for significant impact on the human environment.

**Environmental screening process** — the analysis that precedes a determination of the appropriate level of National Environmental Policy Act documentation. The minimum requirements of the environmental screening process are a site visit, consultation with any agency that has jurisdiction by law or special expertise, and the completion of a screening checklist. The process must be complete for all NPS actions that have the potential for environmental impact and are not described in section 3-3.

**Environmentally preferable alternative** (1505.2, Q6a) — of the alternatives analyzed, the one that would best promote the policies in the National Environmental Policy Act section 101. This is usually selected by the interdisciplinary team members. It is presented in the NPS National Environmental Policy Act document (draft and final environmental assessment or

environmental impact statement) for public review and comment.

**Ethnographic landscape** — an area containing a variety of natural and cultural resources that traditionally associated people define as heritage resources. The area may include plant and animal communities, structures, and geographic features, each with their own special local names.

**Ethnographic resources** — objects and places, including sites, structures, landscapes, and natural resources, with traditional cultural meaning and value to associated peoples. Research and consultation with associated people identifies and explains the places and things they find culturally meaningful. Ethnographic resources eligible for the National Register of Historic Places are called traditional cultural properties.

**Exceptional circumstances** — circumstances that, if they apply to a project described in the NPS categorical exclusion lists (sections 3-3 and 3-4), mean a categorical exclusion is inappropriate and an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement must be prepared because the action may have measurable or significant impacts. Exceptional circumstances are described in section 3-5.

**Finding of no significant impact (FONSI)** (1508.13) — a determination based on an environmental assessment and other factors in the public planning record for a proposal that, if implemented, would have no significant impact on the human environment.

**General management plan (GMP)** — a plan which clearly defines direction for resource preservation and visitor use in a park, and serves as the basic foundation for decision making. GMPs are developed with broad public involvement.

**Geologic resources** — features produced from the physical history of the earth, or processes such as exfoliation, erosion and sedimentation, glaciation, karst or shoreline processes, seismic, and volcanic activities.

**Greenhouse gases** — gaseous constituents of the atmosphere, both natural and 3

anthropogenic, that absorb and emit radiation at specific wavelengths within the 4 spectrum of infrared radiation emitted by the Earth's surface, the atmosphere and 5 clouds. This property causes the greenhouse effect. Water vapor (H<sub>2</sub>O), carbon 6 dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O), methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) and ozone (O<sub>3</sub>) are the primary 7 greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere. Beside CO<sub>2</sub>, N<sub>2</sub>O and CH<sub>4</sub>, the Kyoto 8 Protocol deals with the greenhouse gases sulphur hexafluoride (SF<sub>6</sub>), 9 hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) and perfluorocarbons (PFCs).

**Historic property** — a district, site, building, structure, or object significant in the history of American archeology, architecture, culture, engineering, or politics at the national, state, or local level.

**Human environment** (1508.14) — defined by the Council on Environmental Quality as the natural and physical environment, and the relationship of people with that environment (1508.14). Although the socioeconomic environment receives less emphasis than the physical or natural environment in the Council on Environmental Quality regulations, the National Park Service considers it an integral part of the human environment.

**Impact** — the likely effect of an action or proposed action upon specific natural resources, cultural resources, socioeconomics, visitor use and experiences, or park operations. Impacts may be direct, indirect, individual, cumulative, beneficial, or adverse. (Also see Unacceptable impacts.)

**Impact topics** — specific natural, cultural, or socioeconomic resources that would be affected by the proposed action or alternatives (including no-action). The magnitude, duration, and timing of the effect to each of these resources are evaluated in the impact section of an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

**Impairment** — an impact that, in the professional judgment of a responsible NPS manager, would harm the integrity of park resources or values and violate the 1916 NPS Organic Act's mandate that park resources

and values remain unimpaired.

**Implementation plan** — a plan that focuses on how to implement an activity or project needed to achieve a long-term goal. An implementation plan may direct a specific project or an ongoing activity.

**Indirect impact** (1508.8) — reasonably foreseeable impacts that occur removed in time or space from the proposed action. These are “downstream” impacts, future impacts, or the impacts of reasonably expected connected actions (e.g., growth of an area after a highway to it is complete).

**Interpretation** — the translation of scientific and academic information about park resources into forms that are meaningful to the public, helping them understand and appreciate their natural and cultural heritage.

**Issues** — in the National Environmental Policy Act, issues are environmental, social, and economic problems or effects that may occur if the proposed action or alternatives (including no-action) are implemented or continue to be implemented.

**Law** — The U.S. Congress directs the National Park Service and other federal agencies to carry out certain activities or to achieve certain conditions that it specifies in laws. The National Park Service must comply with these laws and may be sued in court for failure to comply.

**Lead agency** (1508.16) — the agency either preparing or taking primary responsibility for preparing the National Environmental Policy Act document.

**Life Cycle Costing (Analysis)** — an accounting method that analyzes the total costs of a product or service, including construction, maintenance, manufacturing, marketing, distribution, useful life, salvage, and disposal.

**Management prescriptions** — a planning term referring to statements about desired resource conditions and visitor experiences, along with appropriate kinds and levels of management, use, and development for each park area.

**Management zone** — an area with a park that will be managed distinctively from other areas, to achieve different resource

conditions and visitor experiences.

**Manager** — the managerial-level employee who has authority to make decisions or to otherwise take an action that would affect park resources or values. Most often it refers to the park superintendent or regional director, but may at times include, for example, a resource manager, facility manager, or chief ranger to whom authority has been re-delegated.

**Major federal action** (1508.18) — actions that have a large federal presence and that have the potential for significant impacts to the human environment. They include adopting policy, implementing rules or regulations; adopting plans, programs, or projects; ongoing activities; issuing permits; or financing projects completed by another entity.

**Memo to file** — a memo to the planning record or statutory compliance file that NPS offices may complete when (a) National Environmental Policy Act has already been completed in site-specific detail for a proposal, usually as part of a document of larger scope, or (b) a time interval has passed since the National Environmental Policy Act document was approved, but information in that document is still accurate.

**Mitigated Environmental Assessment** (Q40) — an environmental assessment that has been rewritten to incorporate mitigation into a proposal or to change a proposal to reduce impacts to below significance.

**Mitigation** (1508.20) — a modification of the proposal or alternative that lessens the intensity of its impact on a particular resource.

**Native American** — of or relating to, a tribe, people, or culture that is or was indigenous to the United States.

**National Environmental Policy Act process** — the objective analysis of a proposal to determine the degree of its environmental and interrelated social and economic impacts on the human environment, alternatives and mitigation that reduce that impact, and the full and candid presentation of the analysis to, and involvement of, the interested and affected

public.

**NPS Preferred Alternative (1502.14 (e))** — the alternative identified as preferred at the draft environmental impact statement stage or environmental assessment. Identification of the NPS Preferred Alternative helps the public focus its comments during review of the National Environmental Policy Act document.

**Natural Resources** — the ecological features of a park, such as geologic forms and processes, communities of native plants and animals and the processes that sustain them (natural succession, natural fire, natural flood/drought cycles, etc.), air quality and air quality related values such as visibility, water bodies and hydrologic processes, and paleontological remains.

**Notices of availability** — separate notices submitted to the Federal Register that the draft environmental impact statement and the final environmental impact statement are ready for distribution.

**Notice of intent (1508.22)** — the notice submitted to the Federal Register that an environmental impact statement will be prepared. It describes the proposed action and alternatives, identifies a contact person in the National Park Service, and gives time, place, and descriptive details of the agency's proposed scoping process.

**Organic Act (NPS)** — the 1916 law (and subsequent amendments) that created the National Park Service and assigned it responsibility to manage the national parks.

**Paleontological/paleoecological resources** — resources such as fossilized plants, animals, or their traces, including both organic and mineralized remains in body or trace form. Paleontological resources are studied and managed in their paleoecological context (that is, the geologic data associated with the fossil that provides information about the ancient environment).

**Park** — any one of the hundreds of areas of land and water administered as part of the national park system. The term is used interchangeably in this document with “unit,” “park unit,” and “park area.”

**Park purpose** — the reasons why a park is so important that it has been set aside as a

unit of the national park system.

**Park significance** — the relative international, national, or regional importance of the resources that contributed to the park's addition to the national park system.

**Plan** — the documentation of a decision or decisions and all the factors that were considered during the decision making. The National Park Service produces four kinds of plans: general management plans, strategic plans, implementation plans, and annual performance plans. Each of these is described separately in the glossary.

**Planning** — structured decision making.

**Policy** — The National Park Service establishes specific criteria and produces for how it will conduct its activities and carry out its mission. These policies apply to all NPS activities in all units of the National Park System. Park managers must comply with NPS policies, and the National Park Service may be sued in court for failure to comply with its own policies.

**Preservation** — for the purposes of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, preservation means the act or process of applying measures necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity and materials of an historic property.

**Programmatic documents** — broader scope environmental assessments or environmental impact statements that describe the impacts of proposed policy changes, programs, or plans.

**Proposal (1508.23)** — the stage at which the National Park Service has a goal and is actively preparing to make a decision on one or more alternative means of accomplishing that goal. The goal can be a project, plan, policy, program, and so forth. The National Environmental Policy Act process begins when the effects can be meaningfully evaluated.

**Public involvement (also called public participation)** — the active involvement of the public in NPS planning and decision-making processes. Public involvement occurs on a continuum that ranges from providing information and building

awareness, to partnering in decision making. **Record of decision** (1505.2) — the document that is prepared to substantiate a decision based on an environmental impact statement. It includes a statement of the decision made, a detailed discussion of decision rationale, and the reasons for not adopting all mitigation measures analyzed, if applicable.

**Regulation** — Federal agencies establish specific criteria and procedures for how they will comply with laws. These regulations must be reviewed and approved through a formal process, then they are compiled in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The National Park Service must comply with all applicable federal regulations, including those promulgated by other agencies having legal jurisdiction over certain aspects of all federal activities, and it may be sued in court for failure to comply.

**Resource** — something of value (an asset). Park managers often speak in terms of aesthetic, cultural, and natural resources of parks, meaning the parks' major features. [See also aesthetic resource, cultural resource, and natural resource.] The term is also used less frequently to describe the funding and manpower available to managers.

**Road** — a way made for traveling between places. A road is a more formal means of providing access and can vary in type and quality of surface and can vary in width. Roads are generally intended for vehicular access, while access may be by vehicle or pedestrian mode.

**Sacred sites** — certain natural and cultural resources treated by American Indian tribes and Alaska Natives as sacred places having established religious meaning, and as locales of private ceremonial activities.

**Scoping** (1508.25) — internal NPS decision-making on issues, alternatives, mitigation measures, the analysis boundary, appropriate level of documentation, lead and cooperating agency roles, available references and guidance, defining purpose and need, and so forth. External scoping is the early involvement of the interested and affected public.

**Soundscape** (natural) — the aggregate of all the natural, nonhuman-caused sounds that occur in parks, together with the physical capacity for transmitting natural sounds.

**Stakeholder** — an individual, group or other entity that has a strong interest in decisions concerning park resources and values. Stakeholders may include, for example, recreational user groups, permittees, and concessioners. In the broadest sense, all Americans are stakeholders in the national parks.

**Strategic Plan** — a plan describing what a park staff hopes to achieve within the next six years. These plans, required by the Government Performance and Results Act, should include measureable results oriented goals that the park staff can use to prioritize work and measure progress.

**Superintendent** — the senior on-site NPS official in a park. Used interchangeably with “park superintendent,” “park manager,” or “unit manager.”

**Tiering** (1508.28) — the use of broader, programmatic National Environmental Policy Act documents to discuss and analyze cumulative regional impacts and define policy direction, and the incorporation by reference of this material in subsequent, narrower documents to avoid duplication and focus on issues “ripe for decision” in each case.

**Unauthorized trail** — visitor established trail not approved or maintained by the National Park Service and subject to closure due to safety and resource concerns.

**Vessel** — under 36 Code of Federal Regulations 1.4, vessels are defined as every type or description of craft, other than a seaplane on the water, used or capable of being used as a means of transportation on water, including a buoyant device permitting or capable of free flotation.

**Visitor** — anyone who physically visits a park for recreational, educational or scientific purposes, or who otherwise uses a park's interpretive and educational services, regardless of where such use occurs (e.g., via Internet access, library, etc.).

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