

References and Glossary of Terms



Photograph Courtesy of: David Libman

Cleopatra's Bath Tub, Gap Cave

Cumberland Gap National Historical Park
Draft General Management Plan/
Environmental Impact Statement

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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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.

Aesthetic resources—The intangible perceptions possible in parks, such as natural quiet, solitude, and the experience of nighttime skies.

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.

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.

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).

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, structures, museum objects, and ethnographic resources for NPS management purposes.

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.

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 (EIS) (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 preferred 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.

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) — Broad decisions about the kinds of resource conditions and visitor experiences the park should provide over the long term.

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 topics—The 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.

Implementation Plan— Any of a great variety of plans, such as resource management plans, comprehensive interpretive plans, collection management plans, concession management plans, visitor experience and resource protection (VERP) plans, comprehensive interpretive plans, backcountry management plans, wilderness management plans, site development plans, river management plans, and historic structure reports, that specify how a project or activity should be implemented.

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 is complete).

Input—Something, like money or manpower, needed to produce a product or conduct an activity. The Government Performance and Results Act makes a distinction between outcomes (results), outputs (efforts/products/activities), and inputs (money, manpower, and other things needed to produce an output).

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 Prescription—A decision about what kinds of resource conditions and visitor experiences should occur in a particular location within a park. Prescriptions are established for each distinctive location (management zone) within a park and specify (1) the desired condition of natural and cultural resources, (2) the desired visitor experience, (3) appropriate kinds and levels of management activities, (4) appropriate kinds and levels of visitor activities, and (5) appropriate kinds and levels of development.

Management Zone—An area within a park that will be managed distinctively from other areas, to achieve different resource conditions and visitor experiences.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Outcome—A result, usually expressed in terms of resource conditions or visitor experiences. The Government Performance and Results Act makes a distinction between outcomes (results), outputs (efforts/products/activities), and inputs (money, manpower, and other things needed to produce an output).

Output—An effort, product, or activity. The Government Performance and Results Act makes a distinction between outcomes (results), outputs (efforts/products/activities), and inputs (money, manpower, and other things needed to produce an output).

Park—For the purposes of this document, the terms national park or park refer to any unit of the national park system. Although national park system designations formally categorize units as national parks, national preserves, national monuments, national historic sites, national historical parks, national memorials, national recreation areas, national lakeshores, national seashores, national rivers, national battlefields, or national cemeteries, all units of the national park system are managed under a single set of laws and policies with the only distinctions being special mandates included in the specific legislation applying to each particular unit.

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 procedures 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.

Potential Wilderness—A wilderness study may identify lands that are surrounded by or adjacent to lands proposed for wilderness designation but that do not themselves qualify for immediate designation due to temporary nonconforming or incompatible conditions. The wilderness recommendation forwarded to the Congress by the President may identify these lands as "potential" wilderness for future designation as wilderness when the nonconforming use has been removed or eliminated. If so authorized by Congress, these potential wilderness areas will become designated wilderness upon the Secretary's determination, published in the Federal Register, that they have finally met the qualifications for designation by the cessation or termination of the nonconforming use.

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

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.

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.

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.

Recommended Wilderness—The Secretary of the Interior is responsible for recommending to the President those lands under his/her jurisdiction that are suitable or unsuitable for inclusion within the national wilderness preservation system. The Secretary performs this function through the Assistant Secretary's Office by reviewing NPS proposed wilderness and either approving or revising the proposal. The final result is forwarded by the Secretary for the President's consideration. The President is then responsible for transmitting his recommendations with respect to wilderness designation to both houses of Congress. These recommendations must be accompanied by maps and boundary descriptions. The National Park Service will track the status of the wilderness designation process in Congress.

Resource—Something of value (an asset). Park managers often speak in terms of the 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.

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.

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 measurable results-oriented goals that the park staff can use to prioritize work and measure progress.

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.

Wilderness—National Park Service lands will be considered eligible for wilderness if they are at least 5,000 acres or of sufficient size to make practicable their preservation and use in an unimpaired condition, and if they possess the following characteristics (as identified in the Wilderness Act): the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by humans, where humans are visitors and do not remain; the area is undeveloped and retains its primeval character and influence without permanent improvements or human habitation; the area generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of humans' work substantially unnoticeable; the area is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions; the area offers outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.

Wild Caving—Ranger-led exploration of caves that are completely underground, and which occur in areas of the cave system that are not normally open to the general public. Wild caving also presents an increased level of physical and psychological challenge for visitors interested in this type of activity.

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