

# **The Mission and The Function and Structure of the U. S. National Park Service**

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## **Introduction**

**D**irector Connie Wirth began the efforts to professionalize the management of the National Park Service in the 1950s. In 1967 Director George B. Hartzog, Jr. organized the Field Organization Study Team. The FOST specifically recommended the professionalization of the ranger force. When the study team's recommendations were implemented the professional duties of the naturalists, the historians and archaeologists were incorporated into the new ranger series. As they proceeded through the ranks they performed a variety of tasks. The rangers were to be assigned professional duties and an additional series was to be established for employees performing technician duties. These became the Park Ranger 025 and the Park Technician 026 series.

In the 1970s the National Park Service requested funding for law enforcement from the Congress and obtained it. Many rangers were sent to the newly established law enforcement schools and came back to the parks fully trained in law enforcement.

In the ensuing years the National Park Service devoted itself to visitor safety and protection and law enforcement. The park technician series 026 instead of being a stand alone series with its own entrance requirement and career potential became a feeder group for the park ranger 025 series. The duties of the rangers and technicians became co-mingled and persons with comparable training and backgrounds were hired in both series. Many seasonals with advanced academic training were content to accept positions in the park technician series 026 in the hopes of moving into the park ranger 025 series. Park rangers came to perform park technician duties and the duties across the series boundaries became blurred. In the end both series were combined into one, called park ranger 025, but fixed at the park technician 026 pay and career level.

The 1960s and 1970s were turbulent years in American history. The Vietnam war strongly divided the nation and

drugs were becoming all too fashionable. Street and drug related crime increased. The parks received their share and more of this onslaught. With the shift to law enforcement the ranger force was diverted from resource management and interpretation. In the end both series were combined into one, called park ranger 025, but fixed at the park technician 026 pay and career level. Neither the science nor the history programs of the Service have been able to compensate for the lack of professional resource management and interpretation at the park level.

In addition to the problems caused by the normal evolution of the National Park Service, in 1981 the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (HCRS), formerly the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR) was merged with the National Park Service. This merger obliterated the HCRS, but it could not erase the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1962, and thus it saddled the Service with the additional responsibility of administering this Act. Combining the HCRS with the National Park Service gave the Service responsibilities it either had not traditionally handled, or had not handled well. These programs include the grants to the States for outdoor recreation, technical assistance to the States for outdoor recreation, National Rivers and Trails, and Cultural and Natural Landmarks. These additions to the Park Service's long standing responsibility for National Parks, Monuments, Historic Sites and Buildings, as well as Recreation Areas has essentially transformed the Park Service into a National Administration for Cultural Affairs and Recreation. This assumes, as many National Park Service observers note, that the natural area National Parks are cultural institutions and not natural resource commodity reserves.

It is now mandatory for the National Park Service to re-examine its position particularly in the light of its newly assumed responsibilities for national outdoor recreation, rivers and trails and landmarks and arrive at a decision as to how it will allocate its scarce resources to administer all the programs entrusted to it by law.

This paper is an attempt to sort through the duties and responsibilities of the Service in an effort to understand the mission, the occupations necessary to carry it out, and the structure best equipped to support such an effort.

## The Mission of the National Park Service

Many laws, proclamations, regulations and orders govern the mission and the structure and function of the National Park Service. The Organic Act of 1916 is the most quoted source of the mission of the National Park Service. The most quoted sentence from that act follows:

*The Service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations hereinafter specified,....by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of such parks, Monuments, and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.*

The national parks, monuments, and reservations are a bewildering complex of landscapes, scenes, vistas, places, and objects. Because of this diversity there is a tendency to divide the National Parks into rural and urban parks or natural and cultural parks. The National Park Service must face the fact that its resource management system for better or worse applies to the National Park System as a whole and that the System now includes rivers and trails, cultural and natural landmarks. In addition the Service is entrusted with the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1962, which requires a Federal approach to assisting the States with outdoor recreation. The Service is one Service with cultural, natural, rural, and urban resources to manage and with administrative responsibilities to assist the States. One management philosophy and one management system for the system is mandatory.

*The mission of the National Park Service is to: Protect, preserve and restore the natural and cultural heritage of the United States and to avail to its citizens outdoor recreational opportunities, all according to law.*

*The first goal of the mission of the National Park Service is to: Properly manage the resources of the National Park System and other resources entrusted to its care and oversight by the people of the United States through acts of the Congress and Proclamations of the Presidents.*

Many people think of the National Park Service as a land managing agency or as the promoter of an environmental ethic. The National Park Service manages land but it is not just a land managing agency. It manages many historic structures too. While the National Park Service advocates an environmental ethic it does much more than that. It advances a preservation ethic which includes an environmental ethic.

We can easily see an environmental ethic in the management of Yellowstone National Park. How do we apply an environmental ethic to the management of Independence Hall Historic Site? Specifically how does an environmental ethic apply to the Liberty Bell?

What does Denali or the Hayden Valley of Yellowstone National Park have in common with the Liberty Bell? The only answer is they are all resources managed by the National Park Service.

Resources that the National Park Service does not directly manage, it oversees. Cultural and Natural Landmarks of inestimable value are part of the System but not directly managed by the Service. The list includes places such as Monticello and Mount Vernon. These are private properties but under the surveillance of the National Park Service cultural landmark administrators. National Park Service resource management practice and principle affect these places as though they were physically and legally in the System.

The following discussion applies to cultural as well as natural resource management. Over the years resource management has been associated with natural resources. Resource management plans were always implied to mean natural resource management plans. Resource management applies to land and water resources as well as architectural structures and artifacts, (arrow heads and bird skins). Resource management, both natural and cultural, operates at three levels, with each requiring higher levels of professional skill for its execution.

At the basic level, resource management means *resource protection*. Resource protection rangers must safeguard cultural and natural resources from fire, unthinking misuse, poaching, and vandalism. Ranger archaeologists must stabilize archeological structures and they must not allow artifacts to deteriorate. Curators must protect books and manuscripts, herbarium specimens, and museum collections. Resource pro-

tection rangers must visit all parts of the resource. Rangers doing resource protection need professional training.

*Resource preservation* is the next level of resource management. Before preservation rangers can do their work they have to study and understand the resource. Only then can they know what preservation methods to use. In natural areas the preservation rangers must know the successional stages of the vegetation. They may have to keep the vegetation the way it is or encourage it to develop another way. Cultural resource protection rangers must know the origin and condition of the structures they are preserving. If they are managing an historic scene they must know the vegetational stage when the historic event occurred. They must then know how to perpetuate that stage. They must be skilled professionals.

*Restoration of resources*, the actual physical repair of natural or cultural resources, is the next level of resources management and requires the utmost skill. Rangers who physically restore resources must have the knowledge and skills required to do this work. They must be skilled professionals familiar with how to conduct and apply the results of research. In all cases in this paper professional means the Office of Personnel Management definition, namely occupations that have specific educational requirements.

An equally important part of the National Park Service mission comes from the Organic Act. In the paragraph quoted above is the following phrase:

*The service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations....by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of such national parks, monuments and reservations....*

The concept of interest in the quotation is "...shall promote and regulate the use of...."

The National Park Service will promote and regulate the use and maintain the resources "unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." The National Park Service has to understand the resources and must impart that understanding to the public. Without knowledge of the resource both the park goer and the resources are at risk.

The second goal of the mission is to educate the public about the resource. The term educate is used here in its broadest sense and ranges from the proper placement of signs along roadsides to formal lectures and the construction of museums. The educational mission has several important parts. The first is to educate the public concerning the values of the resource. The second is to tell the public what is important about the resource. The third is to impart curiosity and wonder to encourage park goers to explore and study the resource on their own. The fourth is to instill caution and respect especially where the park goer's safety will be jeopardized without knowledge of the resource. The fifth is to show how the park is part of the larger whole to which it belongs. No park is an island, not in space nor in time. Natural area parks are part of the larger biogeographic region and they are part of a larger geologic province. Cultural areas are part of larger pieces of history. The battle of Gettysburg is an important battle and can be studied like a chess game, but its larger importance is its effect on the Civil War.

*The intrinsic value* of the resource is its innate or inherent value. *The moral value* of the resource is the lesson to be learned from the resource (the moral of the story). Moral values come from natural and cultural history. *The ethical value* of the resource guides our behavior and tells park goers how to act toward the resource.

What is the intrinsic, moral and ethical value of the Lincoln Memorial? The memorial is a classic Greek temple. That is its intrinsic value. The building represents the finest stone masonry of its kind. The statue is a tribute to the artist who designed it and the stone cutters who carved it. The architectural and artistic beauty of the monument provides its intrinsic value, which is separate and apart from what the memorial commemorates.

The moral value of the memorial refers to the Union of the States. It relates to the concept, "...one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." The man whom the memorial commemorates saved the Union. His wisdom and compassion saw the nation through its most trying years. The memorial commemorates this man, his work and his wisdom.

The ethical value of the memorial compels us to act with reverence. The ranger on duty will stop children throwing a

frisbee since that behavior is not appropriate to the memorial. The same children throwing a frisbee on the Mall, however, are in harmony with the intrinsic, moral and ethical values of the Mall.

The intrinsic value of the Mall is open space. The moral value is that it promotes outdoor physical activity in keeping with healthy bodies and healthy minds. Throwing a frisbee on the Mall is appropriate recreation. It is the ethical behavior for the Mall.

The worth of the National Parks lies in their intrinsic, moral and ethical values as parks, not as standing timber or real estate. The National Parks are places removed from consumptive commerce because of their singular intrinsic, moral, and ethical values.

*The second goal of the National Park Service mission, therefore, is to:*

*Educate the public concerning the intrinsic, moral and ethical value of the resources of the National Park System and other resources entrusted to its care and oversight and the role and status of these resources in the nation's natural and cultural heritage*

## **Recreation**

The Yellowstone Act of 1872 describes Yellowstone National Park as "a pleasuring ground." The Organic Act empowers the National Park Service to promote and regulate the use of the parks "...for the enjoyment of future generations." The Organic Act sets limits on what can go on in the parks. It says the use must conform to "...the fundamental purposes of such park...." The Redwood Act sets further limits on what is permissible. It specifically enjoins the National Park Service from permitting uses of the parks that are in derogation of the park's basic purposes and it states that only the Congress can authorize a use that is counter to the park's basic purpose.

The National Park Service thus is statutorily obliged to manage the parks in the way called for in the Organic Act of 1916, and the enabling acts. Providing for recreation is one such way. What kinds of recreation should the National Park Service promote in the parks? Joseph Grinnell in his book

"Animal Life in the Yosemite," gives the following example. He begins by describing National Parks as special places set aside because of their unique value. He goes on to say the parks promote "far seeing and far hearing." National Parks, according to Grinnell, are places of clear atmosphere without noises of civilization. Recreation in such parks thus focuses on human enjoyment of clear vistas in the stereophonic sounds of nature.

The enabling act for Cape Hatteras National Seashore specifies recreational activities for the park: sailing, boating, canoeing, biking, hiking, camping, and fishing. Recreation in Cape Hatteras centers on activities that can be done in the context of a natural park.

The law prescribes the appropriate recreation for any given park. Properly developed National Parks can accommodate park goers and at the same time provide for resource protection. The legislators saw the parks as places where people come to enjoy the pleasures of the nation's treasures. Parks for people is a popular theme for park management.

Administering the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1962 is now the responsibility of the National Park Service. These responsibilities were formerly carried out by an entire separate bureau of the Department of the Interior. Unless the Outdoor Recreation act is repealed or assigned to another agency the responsibility will rest with the National Park Service. As a footnote to history, if the Park Service takes up its responsibilities for the Outdoor Recreation Act, it should re-examine the Park, Parkway, and Recreation Act of 1936. This would allow reconsideration of legislation that would have created a National Park Service along the lines of the Forest Service or the Fish and Wildlife Service, where in addition to Federal duties those bureaus have duties relating to the States.

*The third goal of the mission of the National Park Service  
therefore, is to:*

*Provide recreational opportunities appropriate for specific  
sites of the National Park System or in other ways prescribed  
by law.*

The National Park Service is a paragon. It is a model that has been emulated and respected the world over. Within the United States the Park Service is synonymous with excellence



in natural and cultural protection, preservation and restoration affairs. It is seen as the pre-eminent education and recreation agency. The National Park Service is obligated to share that excellence. The obvious method of sharing is by cooperating with agencies and organizations with similar missions.

*The fourth goal of the mission of the National Park Service is to:*

*Cooperate with State, Local and International Park and Recreation and Historic Preservation agencies and other organizations with similar missions.*

*Shortened to the barest essentials, the mission of the National Park Service is:*

- 1. Manage the Resources*
- 2. Educate the Public*
- 3. Provide Appropriate Recreation*
- 4. Cooperate with Related Agencies and Organizations.*

## **The Function of the National Park Service**

What functions are necessary to accomplish the mission of the Service? The mission requires a resource management function. Management of the resources consists of three distinct phases. Each of these phases must be coordinated closely with the other two.

There must be a resource protection function. Properly functioning resource protection includes monitoring the resource, because natural resources are dynamic. Weather data and data from permanent quadrats and transects are needed. The census of animal populations is necessary to determine status of species in the parks. An annual bird census will give an indication of the impact of humans and developments in the park. While some monitoring is routine, other monitoring is at the level of research. All monitoring must be done in conjunction with research scientists who establish monitoring protocols.

There must be a resource preservation function. Preservation of resources requires inventories. Vegetation maps are needed. Species lists for birds, fishes, mammals and plants are needed. Appropriate photographs of the park are needed to add understanding of changes over time. Cultural resources have to be documented. Specimens must be curated and a reference library must be established.

The restoration function of the National Park Service's natural resources management program will require the services of outstanding researchers and scholars. Restoration will not be possible without world class knowledge of the situation. Anything less is to put the resources in jeopardy. Loss of the resource is not tolerable.

There must be an education function. The data from monitoring, inventorying, research and mapping forms the basis for the education program. In addition to scientific papers, books, films, video cassettes, posters, pamphlets, scientifically correct but written for the public, are the proper output for such a program. All this material taken as a body is the raw material for an interpretation program for the park goer, programs that must be strongly substantive, entertaining and able to reach all members of the family unit.

The final part of the three part program for resource management is the restoration phase. Resources are restored only after careful study. If manipulation is necessary to restore or recreate a resource, extensive advance research is necessary. Examples are the grizzly bear problem in Yellowstone, the cougar problem in Carlsbad and Guadalupe Mountains, the endangered Florida panther. After several decades of study, the flow characteristics of the Everglades are still not understood, leaving the management of this area in doubt. The restoration of Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument will require broad research before a truly safe plan of action can be devised.

And finally, there must be a recreation function. A small recreation unit is also required at the park level. This group develops a recreation program for the park goer commensurate with the fundamental purposes of the park.

### **Park Planning**

For these functions to work smoothly, planning at the park level is needed. The resource management plan is a part of the general management plan that should be updated at regular intervals after the initial planning effort. The interpretive plan and the recreation plan are new and will have to be developed. The interpretive plan will include not only the interpretive prospectus but also the protocol for performing the inventorying and archiving functions of the park. The research plan is derived from the resource management plan

but will have to be recast to include materials from interpretive and recreation plans.

The planning function is needed to alleviate threats, particularly outside threats to parks. Non-compatible uses around the boundaries plague many parks. The Service must recognize that the resource values of the park do not stop at the park boundary. The condition of lands adjacent to the parks is of vital concern to those responsible for the protection of resources inside the boundaries. The park must engage in cooperative recreational planning with local, state and federal agencies to insure compatible uses around the park.

At the park level the following general plans, with appropriate action plans, need to be developed. All plans are part of the General Management Plan.

1. Resource management plan. This plan should contain the protocol for protecting and monitoring the resource.
2. Interpretive plan. The interpretive plan should contain the interpretive prospectus and the protocol for inventorying the park's resources. It should also contain a plan for caring for specimens and archiving records and maintaining a library.
3. Recreation plan. This plan will follow the uses of the park policy and will contain analysis of the park's resources and outline a recreational program in keeping with the fundamental purposes of the park.
4. Research plan. The research plan for the park is derived from needs stated in other plans. The primary activity of the park is to manage resources, educate the public and provide recreation. Park research is conducted to support the mission. The research plan will contain sections for cultural, natural and social resources. Providing opportunities for outside researchers to work in the park is part of both the resource protection and the education mission. This activity is accounted for in the research plan.

These plans are integral to the General Management Plan. They are updated as required. When completed these plans describe the professional functions of the park needed to support the mission.

To summarize, the professional functions needed to support the mission at the park level are: planning, resource protection and monitoring, resource preservation, interpretation, inventorying, resource restoration, research, and providing for recreation.

## **The Professional Structure of the National Park Service**

The Service must structure the parks to perform the functions necessary to carry out the mission. At this level where park goes meet the park employees and both meet the resource, the important functions of park management occur. If everybody at the park level knew the mission, a structure would not be necessary or else it would form spontaneously. Parks are complicated. Employees move frequently. It is necessary to structure the activities at the park level so they are logical from park to park.

From the mission we know we must have a resource protection unit. We must therefore have a resource protection unit that also has the responsibility for the monitoring function including census activities for the prominent species in the park. Monitoring procedures are devised in conjunction with the research program and tie into the research activities at the park.

To carry out the education function of the mission we need an interpretation unit is required. This organizational unit is responsible for the lectures, campfire talks, bird and nature walks. It is also responsible for the park's resources basic inventory and for curation and archiving. As in monitoring, the activities of this function are established in conjunction with the research program and are part of the research activities of the park.

The recreation function need not be a formal unit but should be a part of ranger activities. This function requires an outdoor recreation planner and an outdoor recreation specialist. The research component of recreation will be addressed in conjunction with the rest of the research program of the park.

Not all parks need a complete research unit. The regions support parks unable to support their own research programs. Large parks with high numbers of park goers require a research organization. All parks, however, should be able to identify their own research needs.

All parks should encourage outside researchers in the park in order to benefit from their work. If a researcher's work is of interest to the park, the park should seek to support it.

This most important lesson gained from the structure and function of the park is that the park is a unity. It is one complicated thing. The effective organization that manages it is

also one thing. To be effective, there must be close cooperation among the professionals in resource protection and monitoring, interpretation and inventorying, recreation, and research. They must function as a team. They must share resources. They must talk to each other and exchange and share information. To achieve these imperatives, these professionals must work for the same overall supervisor who controls their budgets and personnel, work assignment and who does their performance appraisals. In working closely together as a team the local park staff will accomplish the mission of the National Park Service. Cooperation in executing the mission will result in an overall increase in the efficiency of park operation. This in turn will result in a more cost efficient program. The greater the local cooperation and self-sufficiency the greater the impact of management on containing costs and increasing benefits to the park goer.

### **Functions that Support the Mission**

The resource preservation, education and recreation mission of the National Park Service defines its central functions. Many functions go on in the park which are not central to the mission but which are necessary for the mission to succeed. Foremost among these are visitor safety and protection, maintenance, administration, and concessions. Without these functions the park will not work. They are necessary for the proper functioning of the park.

### **Law Enforcement and Visitor Safety and Protection**

In some ways visitor safety and protection may be the #1 priority of the National Park Service. We invite the public to the parks. The Service is obligated to provide for the safety and protection of this invited public. The protection must cover not only the visitors from hostile and criminal elements of the society, but also the dangers inherent in the resource. The Hecht case in Yellowstone where a youngster was fatally injured by falling into a thermal pool is a case in point. The court held the National Park Service to be responsible for the safety of that youngster. Enhancing visitor experience requires a benign environment. The Service can provide for that benign environment by educating the visitor concerning the hazards in the environment and by providing the physical protection of law enforcement.

## **Search and Rescue**

The National Park Service manages remote areas with difficult terrain, mountains, rivers, lakes and wooded areas—all potentially hazardous to the park goer. Search and rescue is a necessary management tool for the Service. The Service can do no less when it invites the park goer into its areas.

## **Structural Fire Management**

Visitor and employee lives and property and the property and resources of the park are at risk without structural fire management. The Service is obliged to maintain the readiness to combat structural as well as wild fire.

## **Maintenance**

Maintenance is necessary to preserve the capital value of the built environment and to eliminate hazards to park goers and employees alike. It is necessary to the proper management of the park. Buildings must be heated and cooled. Plumbing and electrical service must work and roads have to be kept in safe condition. All aspects of facility management are incorporated in the maintenance function.

## **Concessions**

Park goers encounter concession employees and seasonal rangers far more frequently than they encounter full time employees of the National Park Service. Concessionaires have a privileged place in the management and operation of the parks. Contracts that run up to twenty-five years are ample evidence of that relationship. In most cases the concessioner offers services to the park goer—food and lodging for the most part. In many cases the concessioners offer services that include interpretation. The concessioner then plays an important pivotal role, providing goods and services for the convenience of the park goer and providing professional services as the interpreter of the park's resources.

Concessions cannot be neglected when the overall strategy for the management of the park is devised. Concessioners should provide the same high quality performance of professional activity in carrying out the mission of the park as the Service provides.

## Cooperating Associations

The Cooperating Associations have a vital role to play in the accomplishment of the mission of the Service. While they are independent corporations their purposes as stated in their corporate charters are to assist the Park Service in carrying out its mission. The Cooperating Associations are book sellers, and they are funders of worthy interpretation and research projects. They play an important role as intermediaries between the public and the Service.

By some standards Cooperating Associations are big business. It is time to examine the role of the Cooperating Associations and to encourage them to continue the work they have been doing but to also expand it into the new technological realms of the information revolution. The Cooperating Associations in their efforts to bring the story of America's National Parks to the nation and the world must seek their audience not only in the parks but in the park goer's neighborhood bookstore, drugstore and grocery store, and in the park goer's home through television.

The Cooperating Associations can reach and educate the American public concerning the essential values of the parks long before the American public reaches the parks. This is of inestimable value in safeguarding, protecting and preserving the resources of the National Park System.

### Summary

The mission of the National Park Service is straight forward: manage the resources, educate the public, provide commensurate recreation, cooperate with related agencies and organizations.

The functions necessary to carry out the mission are: resource protection, preservation, restoration, research, recreation, planning, and education.

The structure of the park to provide these functions and these professionals is: A unit of resource protection, preservation restoration with a monitoring activity and with a subunit of recreation; a unit of education with a subunit of resource basic inventory and curation. Serving all professional units should be a research unit. A park planning unit should be located with facilities management.

## Implementing the Mission

Accomplishing the mission of the National Park Service is a matter of attitude and some training, none of which requires a change in the management policies. The mission has to be drilled into the heads of all employees. Albright and Mather training centers have to be pressed into service and the team resources approach used so successfully by interpretation also has to be pressed into service.

The supervisors of the Service have to be taught position management in addition to their other supervisory skills. The managers of the Service have to be taught planning for change as a normal part of their managerial skills. As a Service we must want to work as a team, we must see the advantage to utilizing team resources to inculcate and infuse the new skills into the park environment. We have an abundance of leaders at all levels who know what to do. They must be given every encouragement to do it.

## Conclusions

The productivity of any organization increases the more its employees know and understand its mission. The National Park Service is an ecosystem. Like all ecosystems it will operate at maximum efficiency if its members understand and support all its functions.

Lon Garrison said it: "The parks make us better than we are." To earn our keep we have to live up to the high standards that managing National Parks demands of us. By adopting the mission, recognizing the functions required by the mission and permitting the structure of the Service to evolve to carry out those functions we will accelerate the implementation of the mission. In this way will we insure each park goer the highest quality experience in the National Parks and leave the parks "unimpaired for future generations."

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