

# National Parks in the 21st Century

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The need to protect, preserve, and restore the natural and cultural heritage of the United States will continue to increase from now through the 21st Century as it has increased from the inception of the Service to this day.

The need to provide for a national system of parks—coordinating the Federal, State and local system of parks—is a great unmet need of this nation.

The need to provide to all citizens quality outdoor recreation is a fully legislated mandate waiting to be fulfilled.

A National Park Service that can supply the above needs will meet the requirements for the National Park System of the 21st Century.

The principal function of the Park Service of 1988 is tourism. The infrastructure of the Service, including most of its dollar and human assets, is devoted to servicing the needs of visitors to parks. Development and maintenance, which are tourism functions, alone consume 70% of the Service's 1 billion dollar annual operating and construction budget. Although its impact has not been measured, the Park Service is undoubtedly a major factor in the rural economy of the United States. In the history of the National Park Service, tourism has been the main function and has been the function performed best by the Service. The high quality of this visitor service has gained for NPS the esteem of the American citizenry and the traveling public from around the world.

The present function and organization of the Service is a matter of historical development and the priorities perceived by the founders as necessary to win the support of the American public for the National Park concept. The wisdom of these actions is confirmed today in the overwhelming support of the Parks by the American people and the high regard in which the System is held in the rest of the world. Having solved the problem of handling large numbers of people in the parks, it is the responsibility of this and future generations of managers to build upon the success of the past and extend the fiscal and intellectual resources of the Service to protect, preserve and restore the resources through research, and educating the parkgoing public as to the values of the resources. Education and research will be the principal means of 'maintaining the resources unimpaired for future generations.' Cooperative education and research will be the basis of forming a partnership with the States and Localities to protect the resources of the National System of parks. Research and education will be the means of devising the delivery system that will assure that all Americans have opportunities for outdoor recreation. And the education and research programs of the National Park Service will contribute to the ability of man to survive in a world whose biology is imperiled.

Physical protection will always be needed. Rangers will always have to be on guard for unlawful uses of parks, but no number of

rangers will protect the parks from well intentioned but uninformed visitors, nor will any number of rangers protect sensitive components of the environment from uninformed or poorly informed planners and developers. An education program with a research function is the only solution to these larger protection problems. The Park Service of the 21st Century will have a balanced program of tourism, education and research and protection.

The National Park Service of the 21st Century, then, will consist of the following components:

1. A system of Federal Parks known as the National Park System, together with programs to preserve resources of 'national significance,' for which the National Park Service is the acknowledged leader.
2. A 'Cooperative States' parks program similar to the cooperative states forestry program of the Forest Service and the cooperative State fish and wildlife program of the Fish and Wildlife Service.
3. An outdoor recreation program serving all citizens of the nation through the agency of the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1962.
4. A program of international cooperation to share knowledge, educational principles, planning and development technologies, and research findings with the rest of the world; and, through the World Heritage Program and the Man and the Biosphere Program, to foster a world system of parks and protected areas.

The cooperative states program will provide assistance to the States in the form of cooperative research programs and will cooperate with park, parkway and recreation planning in accordance with the Park, Parkway, and Recreation Act of 1936, which by then will be amended to accomplish the broader purpose of a Cooperative States Park Program. A National System of Parks will evolve from 1 and 2. The Land and Water Conservation fund will be expanded and will make grants to the States and Federal programs to increase park assets as needed.

Recreation will be found to be the major remedy for the stress of modern living and will permeate all facets and levels of our society. Rural and urban areas alike and all instrumentalities of government will become involved with recreation.

To prepare for the obligations that will fall to the National Park Service in the 21st Century the present mission must be examined and amended as needed and the present staffing and management must be examined and overhauled as necessary.

A new mission statement emphasizing protection of resources, education of visitors, park goers and the public will be a step in the right direction. An interpretive program that provides high quality information in highly digestible, rapidly assimilable fashion is what is needed for tourists, while high quality in depth information is what is needed for the serious park goer.

Protection of the resources has to be based upon a well founded and funded education and research program managed at the local level. Protection of resources in a cooperative states program has the same requirements.

The Park Service of the 21st Century will continue the superb tourism program of the present, but will add to it resource management based upon research, and resource protection based upon education. The National Park Service of the 21st Century will be the leader in nature studies and the teaching of the history of the nation.

The single most important step that can be taken by the present management to prepare for the 21st Century is to reprofessionalize the Service. The competence of the Service to carry out its present function is first rate. The present staff is not prepared to carry out the non-tourism functions of the future. The problem is easily solvable: (1) determine the future mission of the Service, (2) set the Employee Development Division to work putting together the plans needed to satisfy the future personnel needs of the mission, (3) issue directives to line managers to execute the mission plans, (4) position management now to insure a successful mission in the 21st Century.

Recreation must permeate all the plans for the future mission of the Service. Recreational education and educational recreation and plain old recreation must be included everywhere it is appropriate to do so. Recreation must be appropriate to the mission of units of the Service. Recreation must not threaten resources managed by the States and localities. But outdoor recreation must be available everywhere possible, in urban and rural settings alike.

A National Park Service sensitive to its changing mission will be as successful in the 21st Century as the present Service has been in the 20th.

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