Related Lands and the U.S. National Park Service

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When Yellowstone National Park was established in 1872, one of the reasons that the Act passed the Congress of the United States was that the park was situated in lands which people felt were not developable. Indeed, the park was so far from anywhere that many people paid little attention to the fact that this land was being set aside. And, although many people recognized that the significant values for which the park was established depended upon land or activities taking place outside the boundary of this newly established preserve, because it was so far away from other developments people believed that those values would be safe.

The same process took place when many of the historic areas were established in the East. Some of the battlefields were established as memorials rather than historical parks. Since most of the battles or other events took place in rural agricultural settings, the feeling was that they would always remain so and that only smaller portions of the battlefields which marked trenches or other significant features needed to be purchased or set aside as part of the park. Many of the Civil War battlefields, such as Fredericksburg and Richmond, were designed to protect earthworks, gun emplacements, and other visible physical remains of the war. The rest of the battlefields would remain in farm lands, as had existed at the time of the battle. Since it was envisioned that these lands would always be farms, there was no need to include them in the parks.

Although we have been operating national parks in this country for well over 100 years and the Park

Service itself has existed for some 75 years, the term "related lands" and the philosophy and strategies of dealing with effects of activities on related or adjacent lands is a relatively new phenomenon. The early superintendents, I am sure, were quite unfamiliar with such a term. In fact, their whole USNPS management philosophy was much different from what it is today. The early superintendents were indeed masters of their domain. They ran their parks with little interference from the public. For the most part, the public couldn't have cared less about what went on inside the parks and the superintendents paid little or no attention to what happened outside of their boundaries.

Gradually, in the 1950s and 1960s we began to realize that many of those values with which we were entrusted were being affected by activities taking place outside the parks. For a long time, however, it was felt that there was little to be done to either prevent those activities or mitigate their effects on park values.

In the late 1970s a survey of park superintendents was made to assess threats to national parks. Although many of the threats listed were from activities occurring solely within the confines of the parks, a substantial number were the result of activities on related lands. Indeed, in the East the principal threat listed was urban encroachment. Aside from seeking legislation to expand the boundaries or to surround many parks with what some people described as "buffer zones," there was little success in mitigating many of the adverse effects. As the popularity of the national parks exploded in the late 1950s and 1960s, the effects on parks throughout the nation increased tremendously.

As park superintendents grew more and more concerned about the growing threats, they became even more frustrated. They were not trained in land development or zoning issues, nor did they have sources to go to, nor available assistance in dealing with the ever-increasing concerns. Gradually, however, a few creative and innovative superintendents and other Park Service officials began to experience some success in dealing with these issues. By the mid-1980s enough of these successes had developed throughout the System that the term "adjacent land strategy" was being used. Indeed, the USNPS's Denver Service Center put on a training course at the Everglades to discuss strategies in dealing with related lands issues. This seminar was designed to expose others to some of the few successes which existed at that time.

Today it is clear that although the Park Service works to conserve a wide range of resources outside the parks through many programs, an expanded ability to address issues affecting park-related resources is needed. These resources may often be critical to carrying out the preservation, interpretation, and commemoration objectives of the parks. In many cases the resources of areas beyond the park boundaries have no protection from any of the impacts of modern development. Unless a positive alternative is created, there is no doubt that changes in land use detrimental to important resources will occur.

I would like to discuss very briefly some of the strategies which have been used to deal with these impacts. I am sure there are many others of which I am not aware but which would be useful for park managers to know and understand.

One of the most threatened of all of the units of the National Park System is the Richmond National Battlefield Park. This park was initiated by individuals in the private sector who purchased eight separate and small tracts of land and donated them to the commonwealth of Virginia and then to the USNPS in the

1920s–1940s. The congressional legislation allows for additional donations of battlefield land to the Park Service but provides no authorization or appropriations for land purchase by the federal government. The park has stayed extremely small in terms of acreage for that reason, but has grown to eleven units and 769 acres through donations. In each case only slivers of the battlefields have been preserved–an average of 2 percent of each action.

The battlefields are located within a 20-mile radius of the city of Richmond on public roads; the park commemorated two major Civil War campaigns, from 1862 and from 1864, in addition to the defensive earthen fortification system of the capital of the Confederacy. A total of 35 battles occurred in the Richmond metropolitan area, where development of land in the city and three adjacent counties has been accelerating for use as shopping centers, industrial parks, roads, and residences.

Efforts to include battlefield preservation as one criterion for planning were nil in the counties until 1987. In that year the USNPS initiated a cooperative planning effort with the commonwealth of Virginia, the city of Richmond, and the three counties. All signed a memorandum of understanding in 1988 to work toward ways to conserve battlefields in the Richmond area. After public meetings and numerous working sessions with county staff and private citizens, a draft document of ideas and maps was prepared. Some residents of one of the counties became upset with the effort and disagreed with some of the premises and persuaded their county to renege on its commitment to the memorandum of understanding. Although the discussions had been open and inclusive and the ideas flexible in their application, a few individuals succeeded in creating a localized atmosphere of hysteria centered on perceived threats to private property rights.

Even so, the need for battlefield conservation was generally reestablished and the will to find ways toward that end was reinstilled in parts of the private sector and elements of the county governments. The city's interest has also been piqued. The Park Service continues to work with the counties, the city, and the private sector to conserve key battlefield land. Some significant successes have been achieved by two of the counties.

At Gettysburg National Military Park in Pennsylvania, the Park Service conducted an extensive series of public workshops and landowner meetings which led to public consensus on a new boundary concept for the park. The park developed objectives for all of the areas adjacent to the park boundaries. These objectives were understood and agreed upon by landowners and public officials.

Legislation based on this proposal was recently passed by Congress, adding an additional 1,000 acres to the park and implementing a broad cooperative strategy for conserving resource values in the Gettysburg area. It enabled the Park Service to provide some planning money to the town of Gettysburg and gave the agency an opportunity to work with the borough of Gettysburg in developing a plan for that community.

Shenandoah National Park in Virginia was created in 1926 to preserve a typical section of the Appalachian range with its flora and fauna conserved and made accessible for public use. It is apparent today that what occurs on lands outside the boundaries of this park has a direct effect upon the character and quality of the park. The decisions made by surrounding communities and landowners have

led to conflicts among competing resource values within the park and on lands related to the park. This park is surrounded by eight counties and thousands of individual landowners. The park felt that it was important to identify specifically what interests it would have in all of the lands surrounding the park. A decision was made to undertake a related lands study for Shenandoah that would seek to answer a number of questions, such as what are the physical characteristics of the lands; what are the important wildlife resources, habitat, natural ranges, endangered species, and landscapes; and what are the existing and committed uses associated with the lands adjacent to the park.

The study began in 1991 in two of the counties surrounding the park. These counties were selected because they were undergoing revisions to their comprehensive plans and because the county government showed an interest in receiving the resource data from the study. The University of Virginia is undertaking a Geographic Information System analysis and doing the study in these two counties. The early reviews of the draft results are encouraging to the park staff. The data appears to be useful in answering questions of what lands are important to the park, landowners, communities, the state, and others. The plan, which will be developed from this related lands study, will identify those lands associated with the park that have values significant to the purposes for which Shenandoah was established and that require some degree of protection. The park plans to pursue this process in the remaining six adjacent counties and intends to try to work with all of the public and private interests to identify strategies for conserving resources of mutual interest.

Perhaps some of the most significant successes have come at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County Battlefields Memorial National Military Park, also in Virginia. This park was established in 1927 to protect four battlefields. Today, roughly one-half of the significant ground in each of the battlefields remains outside the boundaries of the park. The park is located in five separate localities, each with its own government and planning commission. One of the counties is the fastest growing in Virginia, and has been so for over a decade. The park has about 120 miles of boundary, which includes more than 8,000 acres, all of which are starting to become cluttered with shopping centers, housing developments, roads, and other developments. Some of the construction has already destroyed battle-related resources which existed outside the boundaries. Other proposals threaten key values within the park. Furthermore, the park came to be seen by the local communities as an impediment to development. The park's comments about any proposed new developments always seemed to be negative and usually lacked constructive alternatives or suggestions. The conclusion on the part of many was that the park was opposed to all development.

This has all been changed in recent years. The park staff has participated in a variety of community planning groups and have developed partnerships with local preservation organizations and regional councils. The park hosted a series of dinner seminars for elected officials where innovative planning techniques and approaches to open space development were discussed that might be particularly appropriate to areas around the battlefields. The park staff also began to try to find ways to help local communities in their own planning needs and through a variety of opportunities was able to help in securing roughly $30,000 in grants for preservation,

exhibit design, and construction for those communities.

The park also began to analyze the kinds of comments they had made to the development proposals. Similar to what had been done at Gettysburg, the park began to take positions that focused on key park values. These are the specific elements of the visitor experience or historic resource that are present at each individual site. Developed in relation to the management objectives of the park, this list of values captures the park's significant concerns about a given tract or area. The park staff found that not all the values were threatened by every development proposal and modification of a proposal often removed the threat.

The park staff began to spend a great deal of time looking at these threats and proposing some simple and inexpensive solutions which they felt would mitigate them. The first time the park made such a comment at a public hearing caused an uproar. In this case, park neighbors who had expected the park to be their principal ally in opposing this development were shocked and disappointed at the park's position. However, the developer used most of the suggestions and the result is a proposal that poses no threat to the values at that site.

As a result of the park's approach to land management issues, one of the counties asked the park to prepare some design standards for development on related lands. Since the park had no legal interest in any of the lands, staff members were concerned that there would be quite a misperception of the park's intent. The park worked quietly with the county for a couple of years and the county began to revise its comprehensive plan. At that time, the park worked with the USNPS regional office and the American Battlefield Protection Program to provide financial support for the county's planning process. The American Battlefield Protection Program has also agreed to fund some additional work responding to the county's original request for design standards. As a result of all of this, the park has maps and definitions of values of the related lands and is working on standards for cultural landscapes and a voluntary landowner stewardship program developed in close cooperation with the comprehensive planning process of the county. A strong working relationship has been developed which already has resulted in the mitigation of significant threats and promises to ensure long-lasting protection for that park.

The principal values which may be threatened from development on areas surrounding historical parks often is quite different from the kind of threat seen by the large natural areas. Many of the large natural parks exist as part of a much greater ecosystem. Not until recently has there been an understanding that the values of the entire ecosystem must have some form of preservation if the park itself is to survive. One of the United States' most threatened natural areas is Everglades National Park in southern Florida. Although the very values of this park are now at a crisis stage, at least some optimism can be drawn from the fact that almost everyone in South Florida talks about the need to preserve the Everglades ecosystem, not just the park. In South Florida the superintendents of Everglades, Biscayne National Park, and Big Cypress National Preserve have all had extensive experience in working beyond park boundaries. Given the condition of the Everglades ecosystem, one might be tempted to argue that these superintendents have had limited successes; however, I believe they deserve a lot of credit. The South Florida parks took on an active role

in the state of Florida's planning processes.

Florida requires each region of the state to develop a regional plan which is to be consistent with criteria provided under state law. The USNPS was a major contributor to both the development of the regional plans and to the development of subsequent county plans. Water quality and quantity is probably the most significant factor in sustaining the ecological health of South Florida's parks. And, under Florida law, the management of water is the responsibility of the South Florida Water Management District. The USNPS has taken a very assertive position with regard to planning activities which had come before the board of directors of the Water Management District. Park Service managers often have testified before the governor and the cabinet or other state boards and legislative committees to reflect the Park Service's position.

Although all of the problems in South Florida are far from being resolved, the various agencies have begun to work closely together to develop some strategies for the restoration of this ecosystem. The recognition that the entire ecosystem needs attention is significant and is a result of USNPS management in South Florida speaking up on these issues. A significant factor in establishing credibility for the Park Service position was good, sound science and resource information which had been developed by the South Florida Research Center, a USNPS facility located within Everglades National Park.

The planning process is central to the success of all these efforts. It is imperative that all involved understand and agree to the natural and cultural resource values of the area which relate to the park purposes.

One of the best ways to achieve this understanding and acceptance is through a public process to develop management objectives. Objectives have always been included in the Park Service's General Management Plans and more specifically in the Statements for Management. However, often they had little meaning, were not understood or accepted by the public, and would really not stand up to any scrutiny. Nor were they used in the development of specific plans. When management objectives are developed in a public workshop, based on the legislation which established the park, they become the basis upon which all planning documents are prepared.

There is a well-documented need for an expanding regional ability to address issues arising from beyond park boundaries. Clear management objectives should be developed to give guidance on the significance and objectives for lands outside the park. Within its regional offices, the USNPS needs to develop the skills to provide technical assistance to parks to address immediate related-lands issues for the development of long-term, park-wide comprehensive strategies.

It is apparent to many that what happens outside park boundaries is as important (in many cases, more important) for resource protection than what happens inside. If the USNPS is to fulfill the stewardship responsibilities entrusted to it, it must develop a strategy which accomplishes the protection of resources and values on related lands outside of the parks.