



Beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s, the National Park Service realized that, in the words of its director at the time, George Hartzog, Jr., it “had to be relevant to an urban environment . . . if we were to survive as an institution and as a resource for America.”
Scenes from Golden Gate National Recreation Area (California).



National parks help capture the individual flavor of many cities. Street musicians are part of the unique urban scene celebrated —and perpetuated — at New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park (Louisiana).



Buildings preserved at New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park (Massachusetts) now anchor vibrant downtown streetscapes and contribute to the cultural and economic life of this historic city.



Working the locks on the Pawtucket Canal, Lowell National Historical Park (Massachusetts). At Lowell, it is said that “the city is the park and the park is the city,” so closely are the two intertwined.



The Presidio of San Francisco is one of the most innovative places in the national park system, preserving an expansive former army base and offering a remarkable mixture of environments and experiences. Less than a mile from the wind-blown activity around the Golden Gate Bridge is a quiet, sheltered overlook perched above San Francisco National Cemetery.



Across the continent at the foot of Wall Street in New York City, Federal Hall National Memorial, a classical Greek temple-like structure, is one of a half-dozen historic national parks on or near Manhattan Island. On this site in 1789, George Washington took the oath of office as our first president, and here the first Congress convened before the capital moved to Washington, D.C. A constant sea of people passes under Washington's watchful gaze every day, and the site is also a popular location for political rallies, protests, and demonstrations. Ironically, most people are unaware that America's great experiment in self-government began here with the adoption of the Bill of Rights.



African Burial Ground National Monument is just a 15-minute walk from Federal Hall. The visitor center is in a federal building constructed on the site of a nearly forgotten burial ground for (mostly enslaved) African Americans that dates to the 18th century, a time when New York City had one of the largest urban populations of slaves in the American colonies.



Gateway National Recreation Area (New York, New Jersey) provides residents and visitors access to nature at the doorstep of New York City. (left) Seining at Dead Horse Bay; (right) Jamaica Bay and Manhattan skyline from Breezy Point.



Mississippi National River and Recreation Area is a 72-mile river park that passes through the green center of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. There are wetlands, islands, birds, kayaks, historic districts, locks and dams, tugboats and barges, small towns and big cities, and plenty of quiet natural areas—all found along this one stretch of river and its adjoining ribbon of parklands.