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The Success of Planning Partnerships: Three National Park Service Case Studies

The benefits of federal, state, local, and private partnerships that support National Park Service (NPS) planning have evolved rapidly in recent decades. For instance, park planning has been opened up to comprehensive public participation. This has not always been the case; historically Congress often designated new federal parks without eliciting much public comment. A more inclusive approach to park planning has developed from a host of diverse influences. Societal expectations that stemmed from the tumultuous 1960s demands for participatory democracy prompted enactment of legislation to direct federal agencies and bureaus, including NPS, to encourage a host of external parties to involve themselves in the planning process. Park planning became interdisciplinary, driven by environmental compliance that dictates comprehensive public participation. The Park Service has an informal cadre of public involvement specialists who have developed a range of useful tools to assist the planning teams. Contemporary park and central-office managers have assumed a more supportive posture towards public participation duties mandated by Congress. Legislation such as the National Environmental Policy Act has been translated and codified at the departmental, agency, and bureau level into public policy. For example, NPS's 1988 *Management Policies* defined public involvement requirements:

Throughout the planning process, opportunities will be provided for the public at the national, regional, and local levels to voice their concerns about planning and management of parks.... Those involved will include federal agencies, state and local governments, regional planning commissions, native Americans, state historic preservation officers, state liaison officers, advisory organizations, concessionaires, park users and their associations, owners and users of adjacent lands, and other interested parties.

The revised planning policy, Director's Order no. 2 on park planning (1999), further describes the partnership approach:

Good planning helps provide everyone who has a stake in decisions with an opportunity to be involved in the planning process and

to understand the decisions as they are being made.... Public involvement throughout the planning process provides focused opportunities for park managers and the planning team to interact with the public and to learn about public concerns, expectations, and values....

During the past two decades, NPS professionals have touched base with a variety of external parties to make sure the planning process provides a useful and beneficial result to all stakeholders. Contemporary NPS planning documents provide a valuable record of partnerships that have been nurtured and enhanced from a project's start through completion.

This paper will illustrate the value of the partnership approach to planning by examining three case studies whose success was influenced by the inclusion of external entities and augmented by continuing involvement throughout each project's life-cycle. The first two case studies deal with traditional National Park System units. The first, Sitka National Historical Park, was designated by President Benjamin Harrison as a public park in 1890; it then received national monument status in 1910 and was enlarged several times during the 20th century. The second, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, earned its congressional blessing in 1992. The final case study describes the approach taken for a comprehensive management and development plan for Moccasin Bend, a tract of land originally considered for addition to Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park some 50 years ago.

In each of the three projects, external groups, local residents, and commissions or advisory groups actively participated in the Park Service's planning scheme. This personal and professional commitment enhanced the usefulness of the product. Planners devised public outreach and participation strategies tailored to the individual needs of each project to generate the greatest amount of local involvement. This was accomplished to make certain that the widest range of input was elicited to create an effective plan as well as

constructing a solid foundation for community buy-in at the approval stage. When it comes to public involvement, there is no "one size fits all" cookie-cutter approach. Regarding Dayton and Sitka, the approved general management plans provide blueprints for the management, interpretation, development, and preservation of the parks' resources for a 10-15 year interval. As for the Chattanooga study, the U.S. Congress will either consider or set aside the comprehensive management plan's proposals.

As its contribution to a partnership relationship, an NPS interdisciplinary team brings a respected cachet of interpretive, preservation, and resource management planning experience to the affected communities. Veteran professionals have honed a wealth of park planning experience gained from challenging assignments throughout the United States. Recent generations of well-trained planners have been introduced to public involvement methods and techniques in collegiate and graduate school planning programs. These enthusiastic but less-experienced planners have eagerly put planning theory to work in the following case studies.

Sitka National Historical Park

Between 1996 and 1998, planners completed a general management plan for Sitka National Historical Park. This 106-acre urban park celebrates the rich culture and heritage of the Northwest Pacific coastal Native Alaskans (the Tlingit), a large totem

pole assemblage (Figure 1), and the Southeast Alaska Indian Cultural Center. NPS made a concurrent pledge to assist the city and borough of Sitka with gateway planning that linked the park to the city (not a difficult thing to undertake since the park is located just a half-mile from the central business district). This pilot project had been mandated through NPS's gateway community planning initiative, where selected parks collaborate with adjacent communities to address and resolve common issues. In Sitka, Park Service staff had the good fortune to work with an existing community entity created to take a fresh look at local planning—the Comprehensive Plan Implementation Team (ComIT). Part of the initial process to launch this collaborative effort involved the approval of a memorandum of understanding with the municipal government to codify what NPS would do in concert with the ComIT. This congruent planning and design process began in March 1996 and was completed by April 1997. As part of the gateway planning agreement, NPS pledged to assist the Sitka community with the following grassroots issues (among others):

- Assisting in planning for the preservation of the visual and environmental quality of the park and
- Σ those community components shared with the park.
- Addressing visitor distribution, particularly related to overcrowding during the high visitor-use period from mid-May to mid-

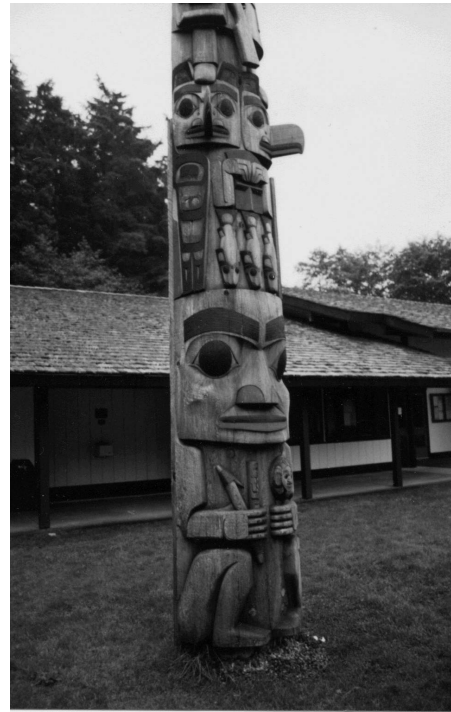


Figure 1. Totem pole on the grounds of Sitka National Historical Park's visitor center.

September caused primarily by cruise ship passengers.

- Σ Coordinating planning of the types and locations of Sitka visitor-use facilities, such as: orientation, interpretation, gift and book sales, restrooms, food service, emergency services, and transportation.
- Σ Providing assistance in designing and locating orientation signs.
- Σ Planning an orchestrated system of access and circulation, including auto, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic routes and linkages.
- Σ Working with Alaska Natives to convey their cultural connections

to the park, including tourism, subsistence, and cultural center activities.

Workshops with Sitka area residents in 1995 and 1996 had identified numerous locally significant community attributes to be celebrated, issues to be addressed, and potential solutions that provided valuable input for the gateway planning process. In August 1996, NPS sponsored a week-long planning and design charette, an intensive and collaborative idea-generating exercise that challenged planners, designers, and community representatives to analyze Sitka's needs and develop a range of alternatives to address the issues identified above. The study document, entitled *Gateway Community Planning Assistance—Design Workshop Recommendations—Range of Alternatives*, illustrated ideas, values, and concerns expressed by Sitka residents, and provided additional recommendations from the objective viewpoint of planners and designers. The gateway plan was an attractively packaged document overflowing with maps, illustrations, and graphics displaying recommendations for future consideration by Sitka residents. Implementation of this cooperative effort will require the city and borough of Sitka, local interests, and other involved entities to reach consensus on the more thorny issues of desired futures for the community.

To accomplish this, NPS utilized funding allocated to complete the gateway plan, which was distributed

in the late summer of 1997. Almost simultaneously, and perhaps coincidentally, positive results occurred, including placement of uniform directional and interpretive signage in Sitka, improved local interpretative programs, and support for a community-sponsored shuttle bus system operating during periods of high visitation. Indirect benefits also developed including more community awareness of the park's mission and goodwill for the Park Service.

Sitka National Historical Park management will continue its involvement with partnerships. In the face of limited or declining appropriations, and because recent federal budget surpluses that have not been translated into vast new pools of appropriations for NPS, viable partnerships have provided an effective method to achieve park objectives congruent with local aspirations. In the future, the park may partner with private or corporate entities or with Alaska Native groups (such as the Sitka Tribe of Alaska). The park could also develop and present interpretive programs in concert with the other National Park System units in Southeast Alaska, Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve and Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park. The park may establish natural and cultural education programs with local institutions such as Sheldon Jackson College or the University of Alaska-Southeast. The city and borough of Sitka could share facilities with the park to benefit visitor orientation programs. The

park might at some point share staff and programs with Alaska State Parks and Recreation or the Sitka Historical Society to present interpretive programs. These potential alliances with other partners who have a vested interest to implement new programs pose challenges as well as opportunities for park management.

The general management plan also introduced several additional partnership possibilities. For example, the expansion of a more permanent shuttle system provides a major opportunity to even the flow of visitors to the park, especially during peak times. An overwhelming percentage of park visitors arrive by large tour boats from mid-May to late August. To make peak demand times work efficiently, shuttle and tour operators would be given up-to-date information on capacity limitations at the park, especially the visitor center, so that they can brief visitors on their vehicles about other worthwhile experiences throughout the park or in the community. Collaborative partnerships can develop a more effective and safer physical link along a busy street between the park and the central business district. Another partnership arrangement may be created with various public and private organizations to establish an integrated environmental education program in Sitka. New programs for local and regional audiences and for national as well as international visitors could be geared to children, college students, families, senior citizens, and

organized groups.

The park will continue its dialogue on a government-to-government basis with the Sitka Tribe of Alaska, a federally recognized tribe headquartered in town. Regular consultation will continue between the park and other local and regional Alaska Natives regarding visitor services and outreach programs focusing on ceremonial, interpretive, and educational functions. The Sitka Tribe of Alaska and the park have entered into preliminary discussions to determine the scope of the tribe's interest in performing components of park operations.

The long-term harmonious relationship between the park and the Southeast Alaska Indian Cultural Center will continue. Since 1969, the center, a nonprofit organization, has protected and perpetuated traditional art forms, all of which provide substantial enjoyment to park visitors. The cultural center's craft workers make and sell traditional objects serving as a key aspect of the park's interpretive programs. The cultural center will remain in the park's newly enlarged visitor facility, with Native Alaskan artisans demonstrating wood-carving, regalia making, and silver working—all of which provide an interpretive highlight to visitors and income for local residents. The park will continue consultations with the Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, the Center Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes, the Shee Atika Corporation, and the Sealaska Cor-

poration.

In Sitka, several essentials were crucial to the success of the gateway and park management plans. Active and committed participation from community decision-makers was important to ensure eventual project completion. Interest and support from park staff and management, and interaction between park and community representatives provided an essential component for success. Such interaction may be enhanced when the park is small, and values inside and outside the park boundaries coincide. Finally, when preparing a plan or study directly for general distribution, it is important to include a great deal of preliminary graphic design strategies (maps, site drawings, future views) that can provide effective tools for the public to visualize future possibilities.

Dayton Aviation

Heritage National Historical Park

The Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission provided oversight and input to the park's general management plan between 1994-1997. Partner representatives, site managers, and local citizens composed this commission, which was mandated in the 1992 legislation with a stipulated "sunset" to coincide with the completion of planning. During the planning phase, park management developed and nurtured an effective working relationship with the federally chartered commission, a 13-member group that provided worthwhile input at various key points.

The cooperative relationship was especially noteworthy in identifying transportation links between the park's four scattered units. This topic, while not addressed in the enabling legislation, surfaced as a long-term need during planning. Presently, a successor to the original commission coordinates with park management.

Different partners manage the park's four units. Park Service management is legislatively limited to the Wright Cycle Shop, the nearby Hoover Block, and a small parcel of land between the two properties in West Dayton. The state of Ohio, through the Ohio Historical Society, manages the Paul Laurence Dunbar State Memorial, located about a half-mile from the core NPS facility. Carillon Historical Park manages the 1905 Wright Flyer III (the first heavier-than-air controllable aircraft) and Wright Hall, in which the National Historic Landmark plane is displayed. Wright-Patterson Air Force Base controls Huffman Prairie Flying Field (the first test field). Throughout the park's planning process, the planners collaborated with these external entities (Figure 2). At each milestone, workshops occurred, input was recorded, and results were circulated quickly among the partners for revision and follow-up. This generally occurred in two distinct phases: one with the partners and a second with the commission at its regularly scheduled meetings. Planners attended numerous commission meetings and held a



Figure 2. Community park planning forum being led by Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park personnel.

half-dozen well-publicized workshops during all phases of planning.

Besides federal-level planning, the state of Ohio created the Wright-Dunbar State Heritage Commission to tackle grassroots economic and community development issues beyond the scope of the park and the commission. The state body had clearly defined but unrealized responsibilities, including preparation of a management plan for properties that should be “preserved, restored, developed, maintained, or acquired,” emphasizing redevelopment and revitalization of the Wright-Dunbar West Dayton neighborhood. This plan will be prepared in

cooperation with the city of Dayton, which is currently implementing its own successful urban redevelopment plan for the neighborhood.

Within the framework of the partnership outlined in the 1997 general management plan, each site has maintained organizational and operational autonomy. The non-NPS partners have established goals and membership responsibilities and convene on a regular basis with park management to discuss and resolve common issues. As of summer 2001, this collaborative approach is working effectively in Dayton.

The challenge to NPS is to meld the newer non-traditional parks with

the bureau's more conventional operational, resource stewardship, and outreach policies. While some of the newer historical parks such as Dayton Aviation have a small land base, their importance to and impact on their host communities often transcends the size of the acreage, annual operations appropriations, and visitation. Non-traditional parks give communities such as Dayton an overarching sense of local pride. Similar to the societal thrust for urban areas to attract Fortune 500 companies who intend to relocate, as well as footloose major-league sports franchises, non-traditional urban-based parks can help bolster a community's identity and sense of grassroots self-worth by attracting the attention of local residents, civic organizations, and the media.

Planners and park resource managers must take into account the intricacies of grassroots support and interest for this unique type of NPS endeavor. Local special interests, even those with widely differing agendas, often coalesce around a common mission. For example, a local historical society, Aviation Trail, Inc., took the lead to save the Wright Cycle Company building from possible demolition. Another aviation-related booster group, The 2003 Committee (created to plan for the 2003 Centenary of Flight) vigorously advocated National Park System status. Dayton-area private-sector opinion leaders lobbied for designation of a new park for seemingly conflicting motives, including heri-

tage preservation, economic development, and urban renewal. Aviation history devotees in Dayton deserve recognition for their vigorous advocacy for designation and development of a new park, one that transcends legislated federal-sector contributions.

The process of implementing active partnerships as outlined in the general management plan has been a gradual process. Effective partnerships take time to evolve into mature relationships. In 1998, the commission had helped establish a Main Street Program for West Third Street, where the park is located. Since autumn 2000, the Main Street Program has acquired six properties and funding support from the federal government. Meanwhile, the commission had hired an executive director and with the addition of staff became an effective organizational structure. As a result of a boundary change, in 2000 Aviation Trail, Inc., added its new building to the park. All these partners are strong advocates for the park.

One area where the concepts outlined in the general management plan have taken a different course has been in the commission's development of a non-profit support group, the Aviation Heritage Foundation. Also, the commission has provided draft legislation to the Ohio congressional delegation to create a National Aviation Heritage Area that would have a core area in southwestern Ohio with links to aviation sites throughout the state. Broadening of

the aviation heritage concept has received large-scale support, with the hope of eventual congressional passage.

In the management of nationally significant cultural resources, there is great deal of buzz about partnerships that sound useful in principle. Such partnerships can actually fall short when it is time for partners to fund capital-intensive development projects directly benefiting resources managed by non-federal owners. The Dayton model—fueled with a mix of federal, state, city, and private dollars—proves what can be accomplished. A partnership works if there is commitment from all partners to step forth. In Dayton, local and state governments as well as semi-private funders were available up front to get the project moving on a timely basis. New parks do not arrive in full bloom, but require a planning and development phase. When this urban park's administrative history is eventually written, the record will credit a diverse group of public- and private-sector individuals and organizations. Friends of Dayton aviation (both paid and volunteer) have spent countless hours to get the new park fully operational and to implement community improvements in the Wright Brothers' West Dayton neighborhood.

Moccasin Bend

In contrast to the Sitka and Dayton parks, Moccasin Bend is not currently a National Park System area. Moccasin Bend is a 956-acre national

historic landmark situated on a narrow spit of land surrounded on three sides by the Tennessee River, adjacent to a Civil War battlefield. The study area is rich with highly significant prehistoric Native American sites illustrating occupation stretching back several thousand years. The site also contains Civil War-era resources including trench lines, artillery positions, and bivouac sites constructed by Federal troops who fought in the 1863 Chickamauga and Chattanooga campaign.

In 1950, Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman reported to the chairman of the House Committee on Public Lands that the "Moccasin Bend lands, which are now chiefly used for agricultural purposes, should be added to the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park for administration and protection in keeping with general objectives of national park administration...." That same year Congress enacted legislation that authorized the addition of 1,400 acres of Moccasin Bend to the nearby park. Property was acquired by state, county, and city governments but never transferred to NPS. In the late 1990s, various local entities reopened the Moccasin Bend issue and by 1998 Congress appropriated funding for another study. Currently the tract, officially known as the Moccasin Bend Archeological District National Historic Landmark, has several non-federal owners and managers, including the city of Chattanooga, Hamilton County, the state of Ten-

nessee, and Star City Development Corporation; one parcel contains a private residence. The federal government owns no land at Moccasin Bend.

To fulfill the congressional mandate, new planning for Moccasin Bend was conducted by establishing an interagency team comprising representatives from the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Planning Agency, the state of Tennessee, and NPS. The team quickly developed working relationships with American Indian groups, the Friends of Moccasin Bend, local, state, and federal officials, the academic community, and the public—all of whom supported and endorsed some sort of future preservation. Planners initially elicited input from the city, Hamilton County, the local congressman, the governor's office, the state buildings authority, and local organizations and groups. American Indian groups, including tribal members and elected representatives augmented by contemporary non-native supporters of the Five Civilized Nations whose traditional heritage was linked to Moccasin Bend before their forced removal to Oklahoma during the Trail of Tears, provided noteworthy contributions.

Public involvement included a series of meetings, open houses, and workshops that attracted approximately 500 individuals in February, April, and October 1998. Informal settings at the initial open houses provided a comfortable venue for interested parties to raise questions

and discuss issues with the planners. At two well-attended workshops held at the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Convention and Trade Center, approximately 100 individuals shared ideas and suggestions. A public meeting held at the Tennessee Aquarium provided planners with an opportunity to describe the purpose and background of the study process while presenting the audience with a platform to articulate comments and concerns about the future of Moccasin Bend. Thirty representatives of federally recognized tribes attended two meetings in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in July and November 1998. The Park Service recorded 50 responses to two newsletters sent out in February and April 1998, and another 43 comment sheets and letters on the draft document in October 1998. NPS also received approximately 3,000 signatures collected by the Friends of Moccasin Bend supporting the creation of a Moccasin Bend unit of the National Park System. Additionally, NPS received approximately 1,500 signatures demanding that the Moccasin Bend golf course be excluded from a possible new park. Thus, the planning work attracted a mixed reaction regarding the future status of the site from a committed and diverse clientele.

Park Service planners completed a comprehensive management plan during a thirteen-month span from mid-January 1998 to early February 1999. Planners who evaluated the site validated its national significance as well as its suitability and feasibility

for inclusion in the National Park System, principally because of the site's American Indian history and relationship to the Civil War. The study recommended that Moccasin Bend be added to Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park. Although there was much support for such action in Chattanooga, as of spring 2001 local boosters and political forces have not resolved future disposition of a state-run mental health hospital and the golf course at Moccasin Bend (Figure 3). Tennessee apparently is not ready to raze the hospital. A replacement elsewhere would saddle the state with a multi-million-dollar capital development project. If the state de-institutionalizes the Moccasin Bend facility, then perhaps the hospital will be relocated to a more central location. As noted above, 1,500 golfers signed

petitions to oppose the elimination of a favorite, low-cost, conveniently located public course. The local congressman, an "on-the-record" supporter of the initiative, was not prepared to get too far out in front of divided public opinion to advocate designation of Moccasin Bend. Finally, the new Bush administration has already signaled that it may not be too keen on adding new units to the National Park System. These unresolved issues have delayed adding the site to the nearby park. Legislation to create Moccasin Bend National Historic Site (H.R. 980) was passed in the House of Representatives in late 2001, but no action has been taken. Parks are not created by the Park Service's merely conducting a planning study, notwithstanding a technically proficient document, a solid record of effective partnering, and an



Figure 3. Aerial view of Moccasin Bend. The state mental hospital is in the clearing in the foreground of the bend; the golf course and a sewage treatment plant occupy most of the bend's neck.

extensive public involvement program. Planners evaluate such resources as Moccasin Bend at the behest of Congress. Once the planners complete their project, it is the responsibility of the local community to lobby the state's congressional delegation for further federal action.

Lessons for Planners

Planners learned a number of valuable lessons from the three projects. Although each general management plan or special study dealt with specific issues in three widely differing geographic and resource circumstances, some common observations emerged. Planners cannot expect or demand that local communities allocate much personal or professional time to a bureaucratic process. While the three planning projects had a great deal of involvement during the initial steps of the process, it was NPS planners who wrote and revised the documents. Representatives from local organizations and planning agencies best serve the process by opening doors to local constituencies, providing technical support, participating in the review function by vetting draft documents, and providing a supportive presence at public involvement milestones. Planners should not be reluctant to incorporate local input in planning documents. This indirect endorsement by an external entity of locally generated ideas, proposals, and alternatives is the essence of public involvement and partnership relationships and often pays large

dividends. The planners must develop innovative methods to conduct traditional business or responsibilities. Even the inclusion of small items in a draft plan can serve as a symbolic victory to a partner with a specific agenda. This buy-in proves useful at the review and revision stage. Planners must make every effort to get a complete draft plan on the street before too much time passes—the public generally loses interest when not given a product quickly. Once a product is ready for review, the local community should receive credit for its participation, whether supportive or critical. People like to be acknowledged as having assisted the planners, who in actuality served as consultants to the community. Meetings, workshops, and other special events must be well publicized through various media in a community; yet despite these efforts, small turnouts at public meetings and open houses do occur. Planners should expect that only a small number of mail-back response sheets might be returned. If a project has gone well and is not controversial, responses may be quite limited. On the other hand, if, for whatever reason, the project blows up, the feedback numbers increase exponentially. Of great importance, funding at some level always fosters implementation. Studies should indicate that a useful level of financial support is appropriate for NPS to assume in conjunction with its partners—all the better if Congress is favorably disposed at some point. Further, there is always an

expectation of future dollars in the pipeline through congressional appropriations during a plan's life span for an existing park unit. A plan should indicate this good news in general terms, knowing full well the vagaries of congressional funding.

Some observations about partnerships in the planning process as well as in the eventual implementation phases are appropriate. Partners often include local citizens and governments, trade associations such as the Chamber of Commerce, newspapers, cultural and historical organizations, grassroots and state history societies, as well as federally recognized Native American tribes and their allies, and federal agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Air Force. Other external influences include congressional, state, and local officials. During the average life of a planning project, alliances constantly shift and evolve. On many

occasions those on the train at the beginning of the journey may, for one reason or another, step off or head in another direction. This is not something to dread; it is a realistic aspect. The most successful projects manage to keep a majority of the passengers on board until the journey ends. It is critical for the planning team to exert strenuous efforts to complete the project in a timely (and cost-effective) manner and, thereby keep the constituents enthusiastic (and on board). What many people outside of government fail to realize is that the federal bureaucracy really grinds onward at a glacial pace; occasionally other entities, especially in the private sector get out in front, change the direction and intent of a project, and charge ahead. In a busy, media- and market-driven society, the National Park Service is not the only game in town.

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