

The National Parks: Shaping the System

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From the Director

The Statue of Liberty, Yellowstone, Everglades, Grand Canyon, Independence Hall, Carlsbad Caverns—these names are known to school children and adults throughout the United States and around the world. The places these names represent are only a few of the 388 natural, cultural, and recreational areas that make up the National Park System. This collection of special places welcomes upwards of 280 million visitors every year who come to learn, enjoy, and be awed and inspired. Congress has described the System, which includes some of the most significant historic and natural places in the nation, as “cumulative expressions of a single national heritage.” These national parks form the backbone of a nationwide system of local, county, state, and regional parks that provides recreational and educational opportunities for everyone.

The story of the creation of this amazing system of parks is the subject of this book. It begins in 1832 in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and threads its way through the Yosemite Valley, across the bloodied fields at Gettysburg and Shiloh, along the spine of the Appalachian Mountains, and down to seashores along the Pacific and Atlantic coasts and the Gulf of Mexico. It speaks to a determined and prolonged effort to set aside and preserve some of the best places this country possesses. It is my honor to serve as the 16th Director of the National Park Service as we protect and preserve this national legacy. It is also my great pleasure to present this story to you. I hope it will inspire and inform and spark your interest in participating in the richness of the National Park System. As always, I'll see you in the parks!

Fran P. Mainella, Director
National Park Service



Red mangrove trees seem to float on water at Everglades National Park in Florida.

Using this Book

This book tells the story of the evolution of the U.S. National Park System, the first of its kind in the world. In Part 1 former Bureau Historian Barry Mackintosh discusses the origins of the System and describes the complexity of its designations. In Part 2 Mackintosh chronicles the step-by-step growth of the System from its beginnings to its 388 areas at the beginning of 2005. Part 3 contains maps showing the extent of the System and its growth over time, a list of all National Park Service directors with their tenures, a feature on individuals who helped make the System what it is today, and suggested readings. An index completes the book.

This is the third print edition of *The National Parks: Shaping the System*, which was first published in 1985. The text has been updated by Bureau Historian Janet McDonnell.

National Park Handbooks support management programs and promote understanding and enjoyment of the more than 380 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for these special places saved by the American people so that all may enjoy our heritage. Handbooks are sold at parks and can be purchased by mail from: U.S. Government Printing Office, Stop SSOP, Washington, DC 20402-0001 or online at bookstore.gpo.gov.

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Campsite along the Potomac River at Wakefield, Virginia, 1924. George Washington Birthplace National Monument was established here six years later.

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