

*General Management Plan*

*November 1998*



**SITKA**  
*National Historical Park • Alaska*

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## **A Vision for Sitka National Historical Park**

Sitka National Historical Park commemorates the 1804 battle between the Kiks.ádi clan of the Tlingit and the czarist Russians, the Russian-American period that ended with the transfer of Alaska to the United States, and the southeast Alaska Native cultures. It is a cultural center for the Tlingit people, where visitors are awed by historic Indian totem poles and Russian architecture. In a beautiful coastal rainforest setting, visitors learn about the pivotal events that took place in an area that was the center of Russian influence in America and remains a center of the culture of southeast Alaska and Alaska Natives to this day.

*THE CONTEXT FOR THE PLAN*



# Introduction

Sitka National Historical Park, which lies on the outer shore of Baranof Island in southeast Alaska, preserves historically and culturally significant sites and artifacts related to the 1804 Battle of Sitka between the Kiks.ádi Tlingit and the Russians, the Russian-American period in Alaska, and the Alaska Native people of southeast Alaska. The park is within the city and borough of Sitka, about 100 air miles southwest of Juneau, the state capital (see Region and Vicinity map).

Much of the land now in the park was originally dedicated as a public park by President Benjamin Harrison on June 21, 1890. On March 23, 1910, President William Howard Taft added several tracts of land and designated the area as Sitka National Monument. On February 25, 1952, President Harry S. Truman signed a proclamation that readjusted the boundary. In 1972 Public Law 92-501 expanded the area and changed its designation from a national monument to a national historical park. The park commemorates a part of early U.S. history, including czarist Russia's exploration and colonization of Alaska (see appendix A).

The park consists of two units comprising 106.83 acres, including approximately 49.5 acres of tidelands.

- ◆ The **visitor center unit** consists of the visitor center (which also houses park headquarters and the Southeast Alaska Indian Cultural Center), the Totem Trail and other adjoining trails, the site of the historic Kiks.ádi Tlingit fort, the battleground of the 1804 Battle of Sitka, and the Russian Memorial.

- ◆ The **Russian Bishop's House unit**, near Sitka's central business district, contains the Russian Bishop's House National Historic Landmark (which was the bishop's residence, with a small chapel on the second floor) and two adjacent historic buildings: the Priests' Quarters and the Old School (formerly a school operated by the Russian Orthodox Church). The Russian Bishop's House is one of four examples of architecture remaining from the Russian colonial period in North America.

## The Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of this *General Management Plan* is to set forth the management philosophy and direction for Sitka National Historical Park and to provide strategies for addressing issues and achieving identified desired future conditions over a period of 15–20 years. The park has been operating under an outdated master plan prepared in 1966 but never approved. The approved plan described in this document will provide specific direction to meet current and future needs, protect park resources, and enhance visitor services.

## The Need for the Plan

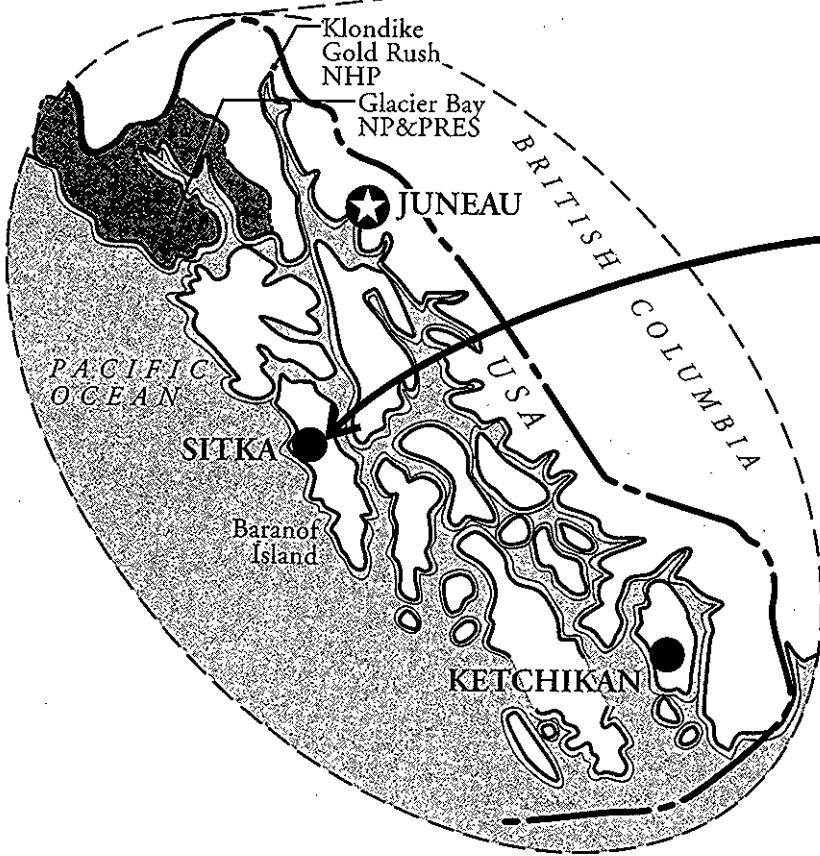
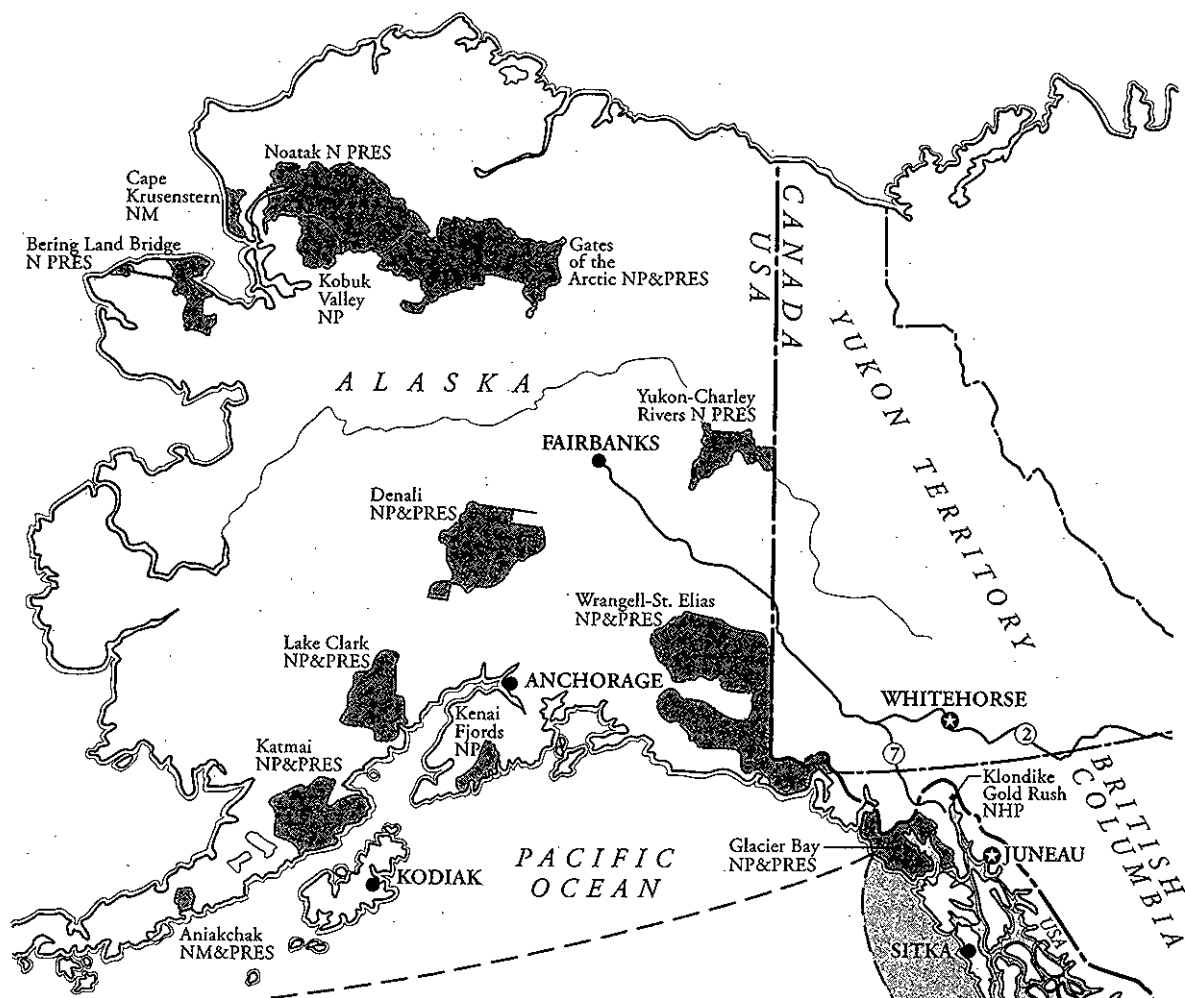
The need for the plan is to address questions and issues that are preventing the park from reaching its full potential, both as a unit of the national park system and as part of the Sitka community. In addition, a long-range plan is needed to guide the park in achieving its vision and to help park managers determine

the most effective use of available funding. Among these issues and concerns are the following:

- ◆ increasing numbers of visitors and crowding at peak periods
- ◆ visitor circulation and safety problems
- ◆ the need for broader interpretive programs
- ◆ treatment standards for cultural landscapes and totem poles
- ◆ potential incompatible uses of three small parcels of land abutting the visitor center unit, Building 29 (a privately owned national historic landmark), and areas near the Russian Bishop's House
- ◆ the need to clarify the areas of mutual benefit between the park and the community of Sitka

## **Review of the Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement**

The *Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* (NPS 1998a) for Sitka National Historical Park was available for a 60-day public review from June 26, 1998, to August 24, 1998. On October 16, 1998, a *Final General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* (NPS 1998b) was released, which documented factual corrections and responses to comments received on the draft document. No substantive comments were received during this period, and a record of decision documenting the selection of the proposed action as the park's approved plan was signed by the regional director of the Alaska Region on November 24, 1998 (see appendix C).



**SITKA NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK**

north  
no scale

**Region and Vicinity**  
**Sitka National Historical Park**  
 United States Department of the Interior  
 National Park Service  
 DSC/May '98/314/20,039

**ON MICROFILM**

# Planning Direction

## Legislative Mandate

The overall direction for the management of Sitka National Historical Park emanates from the 1916 legislation that created the National Park Service to

promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations . . . to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. (NPS Organic Act, 16 USC 1)

In conjunction with this general mandate, the statements of purpose, significance, and primary interpretive themes for Sitka National Historical Park provide the framework on which the plan is based and set the parameters for how the area will be managed and used. The purpose statements tell specifically why Sitka National Historical Park was established as a unit of the national park system; the significance statements tell why the park is important to our national heritage; and the primary interpretive themes list the ideas that are important to understanding the park's significance.

## Park Purpose

According to the park's enabling legislation, the purposes of Sitka National Historical Park are to achieve the following:

- ◆ Preserve and interpret the site of the last major resistance of Alaska Native people to Russian colonization.
- ◆ Preserve and interpret the battleground and fort site of 1804.
- ◆ Preserve and interpret the site of the former village of the Kiks.ádi clan.
- ◆ Preserve and interpret the numerous totem poles that were present in the park in 1910.
- ◆ Preserve and interpret the Russian Bishop's House, an area that illustrates a part of the early history of what is now the United States by commemorating czarist Russia's exploration and colonization of Alaska.
- ◆ Preserve the Russian Memorial, the site of the memorial to a Russian midshipman and six sailors who were killed in the 1804 Battle of Sitka.

## Park Significance

Sitka National Historical Park is significant for the following reasons:

- ◆ It is the site of the last major armed resistance of Alaska Native people to Russian colonization, where the cultural conflicts between two rich and contrasting cultures are interpreted.
- ◆ It includes the Russian Bishop's House, which is the most intact structure of only four that remain from the Russian-American period in North America. The building represents the role and influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on the

- people of Alaska, which continues into the present time.
- ◆ It contains totem poles that exemplify the talents, arts, and cultures of Native peoples throughout southeast Alaska and are presented in a historical context.
  - ◆ It fosters the preservation and interpretation of Alaska Native culture through its partnership with the Southeast Alaska Indian Cultural Center, a nonprofit organization that since 1969 has preserved and perpetuated traditional art and culture for visitors and residents.
  - ◆ It has a long-standing role in the storage, preservation, and display of tribally owned artifacts that are still used by tribe members for ceremonial purposes.
  - ◆ The convergence of the Indian River, the coastal rainforest, and the sea provides an inspiring, biologically rich environment that is critical to understanding the events that took place here. The hydrologic processes of the river and tidal waters, along with good water quality, support important riparian and floodplain communities and intertidal wetlands, and they provide essential habitat for native fish and wildlife species.
- ◆ The story of Sitka revolves around the interaction between the Russian colonists, other Europeans, Americans, Native peoples of Alaska, and persons of mixed heritage (primarily Alaska Native/Russian).
  - ◆ The distinct identities of the Tlingit people and the Imperial Russian colonists, and Russian attempts to establish a foothold in the traditional Shee Atika homeland of the Tlingit, culminated in the 1804 Battle of Sitka.
  - ◆ The land and sea provided a rich natural environment, yielding spiritual, cultural, and physical sustenance for the Tlingit people and profitable resources for European colonists and Americans, all of which continues to attract residents and visitors today.
  - ◆ Sitka has long been a major center of Tlingit culture.
  - ◆ For Russia, New Archangel (Sitka) was the colonial capital for reaping the rich bounty of Alaska.
  - ◆ The Russian Orthodox religion was adopted by many Alaska Natives (who were also educated by the Russian colonists) and retains an active presence in the state today.
  - ◆ The transfer of Alaska to the United States in 1867 resulted from mutual Russian and American interests and the geopolitical rivalries with other countries.

## **Primary Interpretive Themes**

The primary stories for Sitka National Historical Park are as follows:

*THE PLAN*



## Overall Concept: Balance Resource Management and Visitor Use

The National Park Service will manage Sitka National Historical Park to balance the priorities and demands of cultural and natural resource protection and preservation and the needs of visitor use and recreation. The goal will be to achieve a high-quality, diverse visitor experience that is consistent with the mandate and mission of the Park Service and with the purpose and significance of the park. New management strategies, social science methods, and interpretive tools will be used to improve the management of visitor use, especially during the days of peak demand.

A number of actions will be important in achieving this balance. The National Park Service will seek legislative approval for several limited boundary adjustments that will make resource protection and visitor enjoyment more compatible; these adjustments will not provide a land base for new park development. Comprehensive research and interpretive programs will emphasize the park's cultural resources as well as the purpose and significance of the park. Park operations such as resource management, administration, and visitor services will be decentralized, and additional space may be leased or purchased in the community near the park's units. The park will also develop and nurture partnerships with other public entities, private organizations, individuals, and native peoples. Finally, the park will recognize and endorse the parallel gateway planning process (see page 41). These changes will have a direct bearing on the park's operations and its ability to fully realize its mission. The Plan map shows where actions will take place.

The major actions of the plan are described under the following headings:

- Management Zoning
- Cultural Resource Management
- Natural Resource Management
- Visitor Experience
- Relations with Alaska Natives
- Community Partnerships
- Facility Development and Land Protection
- Operations, Staffing, and Costs

For each element of the plan, desired future conditions, along with issues and concerns that must be addressed, are highlighted in text boxes. Desired future conditions describe the desired ends that the park is working to achieve in order to accomplish its purposes and to maintain its significance. Issues are problems that are preventing the park from fully reaching its desired future conditions. The process for identifying the issues is fully described in the *Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement*.

This planning effort has been coordinated with the community of Sitka because many issues concerning resource protection and visitor experience extend beyond the park boundaries and are interrelated with issues facing Sitka. This plan states how the National Park Service, for its part, will seek to address these issues. However, successful solutions for many of these issues will require the close cooperation of all community members as they chart a future for the city as well as the national historical park.

## Management Zoning

Management zones will be changed to more accurately reflect the resources and to prescribe appropriate future uses, experiences, and management strategies. Lands in the former historic zone will be incorporated into either a cultural conservation zone that highlights the connections between cultures and the natural world or a Russian colonial zone focusing on historic structures that reflect the Russian colonization of Alaska. Lands previously included in the natural zone will be assigned to either the cultural conservation zone or the tidal zone (see the Management Zones map).

### Development Zone

The development zone is where the highest level of human use will occur. This zone will be a transition between the urban environment and the natural landscape. The zone will be managed to convey a sense of welcome and to offer assurance that learning opportunities and pertinent information are available and that basic comfort needs can be met.

Evidence of human activities and permanent structures will be readily apparent. Facilities such as buildings, parking areas, walkways, and trails will be managed to contribute to the preservation of park resources and to offer optimal visitor experiences.

A range of visitor experiences will be possible, focusing on orientation and interpretive programs. Guided tours, interpretation, and other visitor activities requiring ranger contact will be available.

The level of management will be high, with the management emphasis on providing visitor services, monitoring the condition of resources (including artifacts), and encouraging visitor distribution. The placement of new totem poles also will be appropriate.

### Cultural Conservation Zone

The purpose of the cultural conservation zone will be to preserve cultural resources, including landscapes and viewsheds, while offering opportunities for visitors to intimately experience these resources. Special areas — such as the Totem Trail, the historic Tlingit fort and battleground site, and the Russian Memorial — will be designated within this zone to ensure the protection of special resources or the sites of Alaska Native traditional activities. Additional areas may be designated in the future.

The conjunction of the coastal rainforest, the Indian River, and the ocean will help visitors visualize and understand the connections between cultures and the natural world. Appropriate uses will be walking, observing nature from designated trails, and watching cultural demonstrations. This zone will receive a moderate level of use, but the use will be less intensive and more dispersed than in the development zone. Visitor activities will be primarily self-paced and exploratory. There will be some opportunities for solitude (for example, watching salmon in the Indian River from the park footbridge, discovering details of the rainforest, enjoying distant views of the ocean, and contemplating events that occurred

