

CHAPTER ONE

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PLAN

Purpose of the General Management Plan

A General Management Plan is required by law for every area administered by the National Park Service (NPS). The purpose of the plan is to ensure that each NPS area has a defined direction for resource preservation and visitor use. The General Management Plan focuses on why the area was established and what resource conditions and visitor experiences should be achieved and maintained over time. The plan takes a long-term view and is updated as conditions change, about every 15-20 years.

General management plans consider an area's mission, or purpose, and provide management prescriptions, which include desired resource conditions and visitor experiences for all the different portions of a NPS-administered area. As a general rule, specific sites and facilities are not included in general management plans. However, in the present General Management Plan specific sites and facilities are considered in some detail because the public expressed a desire for more information about future area management.

Need for the General Management Plan and Background of Public Involvement

For this first NPS General Management Plan for Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area, there needs to be a clarification and reaffirmation of what must be achieved in the National Area. These requirements are based on the legislative purpose of the National Area, its significance, any special legislative mandates, administrative commitments, and the body of laws and policies directing management of all areas administered by the NPS. These requirements are discussed in Chapter Two, Required Management—The Institutional Framework.

The process of formulating management alternatives is documented in Chapter Three. Chapter Four identifies the affected environment, i.e., those elements of the natural and cultural environment that would potentially be affected by implementation of any of the alternatives. Identification of potential environmental consequences of the alternatives is discussed in Chapter Five.

Throughout the planning process, the public expressed interest in numerous issues, broadly categorized below.

- Certain visitor uses and facilities in certain locations
- More (or less) of a certain type of use
- More (or fewer) visitor facilities
- Conditions and standards for trails
- Impacts caused by certain types of uses
- Appropriate levels of use
- Past uses of the area by local residents
- Use of the O&W railbed
- Undeveloped, roadless areas for solitude
- Visitor impacts on the economy
- Historic landscape restoration and interpretation
- Ecosystem management
- Native species restoration
- Hunting opportunity
- Water quality problems

Upon consideration of the overall planning task by the public and the NPS, the following questions were raised that had been addressed only generally in the February 2000 draft. These questions are addressed more specifically in this final GMP:

- What resource management strategies would support the achievement of the National Area's purpose and maintain its significance?
- What visitor experiences are appropriate in the National Area to allow visitors to enjoy and appreciate the area's attributes and to permit healthful outdoor recreation?
- How do the many and differing requirements pertaining to the gorge and plateau affect planning for the National Area?
- Where should recreation use and facility development occur and what kinds and levels are appropriate?
- What should the official system of roads and trails include?

The public was initially engaged by the first of a series of newsletters distributed in May 1997 to an extensive mailing list of elected officials, agencies, organizations, and individuals. Names were added to the mailing list as people became aware of the planning effort, and the list currently has nearly 500 entries. The newsletters were used to explain the planning process, discuss various influences on that process, announce public meetings, report back to the public what issues and comments had been received at the various meetings, and provide ideas for comment. Newsletters were also made available at local community gathering locations at the suggestion of a National Area employee. They were also posted on the National Area's web site.

During the early months of the process, numerous officials, agencies, and organizations were sent the first newsletter as well as a letter announcing the process and requesting identification of issues that should be included. These efforts were supplemented by those of National Area staff members, who made local contacts at regular meetings held by community and service organizations.

In June 1997, nine public meetings ("scoping meetings") were held in locations ranging from Knoxville to Murfreesboro and including the surrounding local Kentucky and Tennessee area to inform people of the planning process and to invite comments on planning issues. Five public meetings were held in four local and regional locations in November and December 1998 to discuss ideas for alternatives. Another series of six meetings was held over a two-week period at local and regional locations in April 2000 to receive comments on the first official draft plan and also to discuss what was then to be a separate planning effort for National Area roads and trails. Comments were received at the meetings and afterward in response forms, letters, and electronic mail.

In addition to these meetings, NPS undertook a targeted effort during this period to obtain the views of the general public. NPS wanted to hear from others in the local area who might not have been included in, or taken advantage of, the normal NPS public involvement methods. NPS contracted with the University of Kentucky to gather information in the surrounding counties using ethnographic study techniques to identify the preferences and concerns of these people. Participation in the effort was well received, and common themes appearing in the conversations, interviews, and focus groups reflected and corroborated the substance of comments NPS received through other means.

Largely as a result of these efforts, NPS decided to prepare a supplemental draft GMP/EIS. Faced with the need to gather more information for a supplemental draft document, NPS entered into an intensive data collection effort. This took two forms, a public effort and an internal effort. In order to supplement information gained during preparation of the first draft, focus groups were established consisting of different user group representatives and representatives of the local communities, including elected officials. Three groups were formed and an initial series of evening meetings was held in Stearns, Kentucky and in Jamestown and Oneida, Tennessee. Meetings were held during May and June of 2000. Following these meetings, and after a period

of data collection and analysis, additional meetings of the focus groups were held in January, March, and July of 2001 at the National Area's headquarters, a central location. One of the main purposes of the groups was to identify the desirable characteristics of a road and trail system for the National Area. A summary of this discussion is included in the appendix.

The second form of information gathering was internal and involved the formation of a team of National Area personnel, consisting of specialists from each division of the organization. Other personnel were involved as needed. The initial effort of the team was to develop a basic data set of consistent information on roads and trails. A significant amount of time was invested in this effort in order to respond to the public's desire for additional detail and because of NPS' decision to incorporate roads and trails planning into the general management plan. Initial road and trail documentation required over 50 days of meetings with the team of seven staff. These data were then converted for entry into the National Area's geographic information system. Reviews, corrections, and analyses of these data and information gathered on development sites and natural and cultural resources required, conservatively, over 5,000 hours of staff time.

Regular contacts continued through meetings with groups and organizations by various members of the National Area staff that kept open the dialogue concerning the planning process and planning issues. As a result of these efforts, a *Supplemental Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* was released in January 2003. The public comment period on this document lasted until May 2003, during which time a series of four public meetings was held at locations in Tennessee and Kentucky.

The *Supplemental Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* generated a total of 171 comments from the public. (Multiple copies of identical postcards were counted as a single comment, as were petitions.) Based on a review of these comments and additional internal deliberations, NPS has revised the plan in certain particulars and approved it for publication in final form. The result is this *Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*, which has long been needed for the National Area.