

**CASE STATEMENT**  
**A Seamless National Network of Parks, Historic Places, and  
Open Spaces**

**Background**

National parks, and the special places managed by Tribes, federal agencies, state and local entities, and non-profit friends, can together be seen as networks of parks and conservation areas that protect nature and culture, provide recreational opportunities, and preserve our heritage. In doing so, parks and conservation areas provide context and meaning to our lives as citizens. They instill a sense of appreciation for our democracy, stimulate pride in our country, and strengthen our connections to the natural world and our history in that world. Thus, parks and conservation areas contribute greatly to the quality of life on which our individual and collective health and well being depend.

Despite the diversity of conservation assistance and land management activities it conducts, the National Park Service does not and can not protect parks and conserve special places alone. The Service relies on a strategy that recognizes that park protection and conservation is a shared responsibility. The Service and our partners understand it is only through combined efforts that we can help our society to succeed in passing on, unimpaired, to future generations the national system of parks and special places we together manage and enjoy. Our most effective work results from engagement with others, where the collective effort extends the reach of all.

A remarkable network of public and private open spaces already exists in this country. Tens of thousands of citizens, non-profit groups, city, State, and regional entities, federal agencies, land trusts and park and forest districts are working in partnerships to provide more recreation opportunities and link landscape elements. Collectively all these players are working toward a number of visions, which may be summed up as a seamless national network of parks, places, and open spaces.

Recently the NPS was challenged by its Advisory Board to "... be an energetic advocate of outdoor recreation and open space conservation, and other considerable public benefits they provide...[and to] serve as a catalyst to encourage collaboration among public and private park and recreation systems at all levels – to build a national network of parks and open space across America." At its March 2002 meeting the National Leadership Council of the NPS adopted as a vision: "By 2005, the National Park Service, working with its partners, will be one of the leaders in connecting Americans with a seamless national network of parks, places, and open spaces that enhance the protection and understanding of America's heritage and resources and provides recreational opportunities for all." Director Mainella followed up with an April 2 memorandum to all NPS employees underscoring how this vision advances the NPS mission.

## Why Networks?

America today is a place of changing demographics and increasing demands for close-to-home (as well as remote) recreation. Americans, especially our youth, are losing our connections to our heritage, both historic and natural. At the same time, issues of development, smart growth, and sustainability challenge our communities. Biologists cite an imperative to link reserves and open space with wildlife corridors and flyways. Public health experts have decreed a national obesity epidemic. Land managers face endless user conflicts, while frequently missing opportunities for increased efficiency and effectiveness of service achievable through cooperation with adjoining land managers and private interests. Agencies are repeatedly told that the public doesn't know – and doesn't care - who manages or owns parks and forest lands, as long as they are reasonably accessible and well managed.

Connected networks have enormous potential for the nation, at once increasing efficiencies of service and availability of information for Americans, expanding the spectrum of recreation opportunities, providing transportation alternatives, better protecting our natural and cultural heritage, and providing the backbone for improved physical health of the nation. Our national health care costs, through prevention, can be reduced.

Networks—at various scales, with varied purposes—are a solution.

## Piecing Together a Network

A successful nationwide network—or really a series of local and regional networks—will emerge from improved communication and a coordinated discussion among the hundreds of stakeholders from the private and public sectors. It is these local and regional successes that collectively translate into a network that is truly national in scope.

Networks tend to fall into one or more of three categories:

### **ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORK(S)**

- public-private and inter-jurisdictional coordination and partnerships
- shared planning, management, scientific and GIS data, and marketing
- sharing of staff and resources

### **INFORMATION/PROGRAMMATIC NETWORK(S)**

- websites and “distance learning” opportunities
- coordinated education and interpretive themes
- “one-stop” recreation information, fees, and permitting

### **PHYSICAL NETWORK(S)**

- greenways and trails for health, recreation, and connecting people to the land
- parks, cultural sites, refuges, rangelands, and reserves as hubs in the network
- wildlife corridors

While no one entity will “lead” the creation of a nationwide or regional network, many have roles to play. With its responsibilities under the organic act, and the Outdoor Recreation Act's

mandate to coordinate and convene, the National Park Service expects to play a significant role as a catalyst in moving the network concept forward. Building effective partnerships will be its number one objective as NPS finds ways to augment, supplement, boost, and add value to the network without leading or controlling it. NPS roles will include, in different contexts, convenor, coordinator, exemplar, documenter, trainer, facilitator, marketer, funder, and provider of incentives and technical assistance. . NPS staff will follow a virtual “checklist of inclusiveness” to insure that consultation and communications reach out to an ever-wider circle of partners. This will be a new way of doing business for the agency. NPS will put a premium on finding ways to help others advance their organizational agendas – not just the Service’s - in pursuit of conservation and recreation goals. In some cases NPS may be a major partner; in others, the network may develop with little or no direct NPS engagement.

## **Examples of Networks**

### **CHESAPEAKE BAY GATEWAYS**

The Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network is a system of over 100 sites, including parks, refuges, museums, historic communities, and water trails, in the 64,000 square-mile, three state, Chesapeake Bay watershed. Managed by over 50 different partners these sites provide access to Chesapeake resources and tell a part of the Bay story. Linked as a Network—through maps, guides, a web site, collaborative projects and integrated interpretation—they provide a way for over 15 million watershed residents to experience and understand the Bay as a whole. NPS coordinates the Gateways Network and directly manages eight of the Gateway sites.

### **APPALACHIAN TRAIL**

In its 2155-mile length, the Appalachian Trail passes through 14 states, eight National Forests, six units of the National Park System, and over 80 units of State, local, and private parkland and open space. Its corridor now comprises over 100,000-acres. The Trail provides not only recreation for over four million users a year, but also a continuous greenway corridor near the crest of the Appalachian Mountains from Georgia to Maine (fulfilling MacKaye’s vision of 80 years ago). The trail is managed under a pioneering Cooperative Management System, which pulls together the 32 local Trail maintaining clubs with local governments, the 14 states, and four Federal agencies, as well as land trusts and conservancies. NPS’s Appalachian Trail Project office works very closely with the non-profit Appalachian Trail Conference to coordinate management, recreation, and land protection.

### **CLEVELAND METROPARKS AND CUYAHOGA VALLEY NATIONAL PARK**

Comprised of 33,000-acres of pastoral valley along a 22-mile segment of the Cuyahoga River in northern Ohio, the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area contains many diverse attractions for visitors to enjoy. Nestled between the Cleveland and Akron, metropolitan areas, the CVNP offers a nearby escape from urban life by providing opportunities for recreation, venues for performing arts, meeting grounds for youth and scout camps, and historical and educational centers. Sharing some of its boundaries with Cleveland Metroparks and Summit County park units, the CVNP is part of a successful alliance of over 20 partners—including community redevelopment groups and non-profit organizations—that cooperatively manage land and activities within the Cuyahoga River Valley. The Ohio and Erie Canal National Heritage area extends for another XX miles the corridor's recreational and natural benefits.

**REDWOODS NATIONAL AND STATE PARKS**

The National Park Service, California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR), and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) are working together to provide recreational trails and interpretive trails complete with wayside exhibits. The partnership with the State and Federal agencies on the management of 113,000 acres of Redwood forest includes shared maintenance facilities, joint trail efforts, and information sharing for recreation opportunities. The distinctions between the State and Federal properties are often blurred for the public as the two agencies work together to manage campgrounds, provide visitor services, and maintain roads and structures. There were 383,000 visitors to the parks in 2000, with 38,000 overnight stays in the co-managed campgrounds in 2000.

**OUTSIDE LAS VEGAS PARTNERSHIP**

NPS, BLM, USFS, and the USFWS are working cooperatively to manage seven National Recreation Areas and Refuges (totaling seven million-acres) surrounding Las Vegas. The agencies share staff and resources in such areas as fire management, litter control, and recreation information. In addition, they have joined with Clark County and the private sector, under the umbrella of a new foundation (“Outside Las Vegas”), to protect habitat and provide recreation and open space in the most rapidly growing county in the Nation. The foundation is spawning dozens of new partnerships. The former Superintendent of Lake Mead is the President of the new foundation; the current Superintendent is a key player in the partnership and has contributed a full-time staff person (other agencies provide some funds) to help coordinate the interagency work. RTCA has placed a full-time staffer in Las Vegas. Through a recent Congressional act (the Southern Nevada Public Lands Act), funds for land acquisition, capital improvements, and affordable housing are generated from the sale of surplus BLM lands. Already \$13 million has been made available for habitat conservation and park and trail development. The goal: a legacy of healthy public lands around Las Vegas.

**FLORIDA GREENWAYS**

Florida has a protected system of greenways that is planned and managed to conserve native landscapes, ecosystems, and their species; and to connect people to the land and their archaeological, historic and cultural resources. Parks and open spaces are linked by corridors that provide recreational opportunities for hiking, biking, canoeing, horseback riding and the enjoyment of nature. Partners in the Florida greenways include State, Federal, and private entities and are overseen by the Florida Greenways Commission and several coordinating councils. The system includes over 2500-miles of paddling trails; 7200-miles of terrestrial trails and over 8 million acres of conservation land in public ownership and an additional 2.5 million-acres currently in private ownership. The area includes several National Parks including Dry Tortugas (6500-acres), Everglades (1.5 million-acres including the expansion areas). The greenways are also linked through an information sharing network run by the University of Florida that contains a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) database compliant with Federal metadata standards. All data on the greenways are served to the web and maps can be generated from that web site.

**PUBLIC LANDS INFORMATION CENTERS (ALASKA)**

The NPS is working with BLM, USFS, BIA, UFWS, and Alaska State Parks to fund and operate two Alaska information Centers, in Fairbanks and Anchorage. Congress established the Centers in 1980 as sources of interpretative services and visitors information about all public lands and resources in Alaska. The centers were intended to be convenient one-stop comprehensive centers assuring that visitors and residents receive high quality orientation materials. The Fairbanks office is administrated by the NPS but delivers information on all of the agencies. The centers promote the appropriate use of Alaska natural, cultural, and historic resources and an understanding of the many agencies managing those resources. The centers attain cost efficiencies by consolidating information, fee collection, and trip-planning assistance in a manner that avoids duplication of effort while reducing the overall cost for all partners.

### **Additional Examples of Networks**

CATOCTIN STATE AND NATIONAL PARKS (MD)

POTOMAC HERITAGE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL (MD, VA, PA)

RECREATION ONE-STOP (NATIONAL)

COLORADO OUTDOOR RECREATION RESOURCE PROJECT (CORRP) (CO)

TIMUCUAN PRESERVE (FL)

JOHN H. CHAFEE BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR (RI, MA)

CONFLUENCE GREENWAYS PROJECTS (MO)

GOLDEN GATE NRA/SAN FRANCISCO BAY (CA)

SOUTH PUGET SOUND/PIERCE COUNTY (WA)

OUTDOOR AMERICA (WI)

MISSISSIPPI NATIONAL RIVER AND RECREATION AREA (MN)

GREATER YELLOWSTONE JACKSON (WY)

NEW YORK HARBOR (NY)

THE POCONOS (PA)

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE DEMONSTRATION Project (DC, MD VA)