

APPENDIX D

**United States Department of the Interior,
National Park Service
Record of Decision
Final General Management Plan and
Final Environmental Impact Statement.**

New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park

Pursuant to Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), Public Law 91-190 as amended, and specifically to regulations promulgated by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1505.2), the Department of the Interior, National Park Service, has prepared the following Record of Decision on the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the General Management Plan (GMP) for New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park in Massachusetts.

Introduction

New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, located in Bristol County, Massachusetts, was established on November 12, 1996. Public Law 104-333, Section 511 called for the establishment of the historical park “in order to preserve for the benefit and inspiration of the people of the United States . . . certain districts, structures, and relics located in New Bedford, Massachusetts and associated with the history of whaling and related social and economic themes in America.”

Public Law 104-333 Section 511 required that “not later than the end of the second fiscal year beginning after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Resources of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate a general management plan for the park and shall implement such plan as soon as practically possible.” In addition, Public Law 95-625, the National Parks and Recreation Act, requires the preparation and timely revision of general management plans (GMP) for each unit of the national park

system. Section 604 of that act describes the requirements for GMPs as including “...measures for the preservation of the area’s resources...indications of types and general intensities of development associated with public enjoyment and use...indications of potential modifications to the external boundaries of the unit and the reasons therefore... and identification of and implementation commitments for visitor carrying capacity”. This is the first general management plan prepared for New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park.

Some of the key issues that emerged during the course of the planning process and that are considered in the GMP/EIS include the need to: develop a statement of the park’s role and responsibilities relative to resource protection given the limits placed on federal ownership and authorities; clearly define the relationship between the National Park Service and the New Bedford Historical Commission to ensure that the park mission and commission actions correspond; evaluate and address present and future needs for NPS technical and financial assistance to local park partners; address the stabilization and rehabilitation of the fire-damaged Corson Block Building located on a critical site within the park; identify opportunities for improving overall protection of and public access to historic collections within the park; define an approach to coordinate visitor services among partners so that visitors enjoy a seamless experience; define criteria for procuring appropriate administrative, classroom and flexible meeting space; and define the relationship between New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park and the Iñupiat Heritage Center as directed by the park’s enabling legislation.

The plan identifies the mission, significance, goals and interpretive themes for New Bedford Whaling NHP. The GMP/EIS provides a framework for guiding future decisions and outlines long-term, collaborative strategies for protecting park resources, providing for high-quality interpretive and educational opportunities, offering a full range of visitor services, expanding partnership opportunities, and providing for efficient park operations.

Background

New Bedford Whaling NHP encompasses 34 acres spread over 13 city blocks, including the New Bedford Historic District, a national historic landmark district. The schooner *Ernestina*, a national historic landmark berthed at State Pier on the waterfront, is considered to be within the park. The National Park Service may also assist in preserving and interpreting several properties integral to the park but outside its physical boundary: the southwest corner of State Pier, Waterfront Park, the Wharfinger Building, the Bourne Counting House, and the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum.

The park boundary embraces more than 70 properties, most of which are historic structures in private ownership. Some are owned and managed by other government agencies. Many of the sites that are specifically named in the legislation are located within the designated port area (DPA) on the waterfront. They are subject to local and state land-use regulations, including specific DPA provisions intended to preserve and promote maritime industries.

New Bedford Whaling NHP commemorates a living history and heritage reaching back to New

Bedford's dynamic era as the world's foremost whaling port during the 19th century. This history is preserved through a broad assortment of cultural resources—historic landscapes, buildings, and museum and archival collections—that collectively recount the story of a remarkable time. During much of the 19th century, whaling was one of America's leading industries contributing to the new nation's domestic and foreign economic and political vitality. New Bedford's whaling merchants operated a complex business network that supported the whaling industry and included shipbuilding, rope and sail making, finance and insurance. The ethnic diversity of the whaling fleet's crewmembers—representing cultures from around the world—enriched New Bedford with a cosmopolitan influence that continues to this day.

New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park is a partnership park, with limited property in federal ownership, which must work collaboratively with other institutions to achieve its resource protection and public use mandates. The park actively coordinates programming and activities with a number of city offices and local institutions, including the New Bedford Whaling Museum, the New Bedford Port Society, the Schooner *Ernestina* Commission, the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum, the New Bedford Historical Society, the Waterfront Historic Area League (WHALE), and the New Bedford Historical Commission. The park has also developed a relationship with the Iñupiat Heritage Center in Barrow, Alaska. Barrow was an important outpost for New England whalers in the Arctic during the late 19th century. The Iñupiat Heritage Center is named as a partner in the park's enabling legislation.

Decision (selected action)

The NPS will implement the proposed management option (selected action) as described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement released on July 02, 2001. The selected action is a revised version of Management Option 2, which was the preferred alternative in the Draft GMP/EIS.

In the selected option the National Park Service would share responsibility with its partners for protecting the park's historic resources and offering effective programming to the visiting public. The National Park Service would bring the story of New Bedford and American whaling to a national audience. Public education, interpretation, research, and technical training aimed at generating understanding and fostering greater resource stewardship would be emphasized through National Park Service activities. Under this management option, the National Park Service's role and responsibilities would be expanded with regards to historic preservation and universal access.

The National Park Service would help develop an audiovisual program presenting the story of American whaling, sponsor more visitor programming and educational outreach; expand the number of NPS rangers in the park, and support the development of an Artist-in-Residence program. The National Park Service would also take the lead in working with park partners to identify and rehabilitate (if necessary) a building within the historic district to provide for administrative, classroom and program space.

The National Park Service would assume a more proactive role in resource protection. The National Park Service would actively seek the donation of and

hold facade and preservation easements; sponsor a restoration matching grant program for mission essential buildings and landscapes; and serve as a voting member of the New Bedford Historical Commission which is responsible for reviewing all proposed development and redevelopment activity within the park's boundary. The National Park Service would support a series of ethnographic studies on the historic and contemporary relationship between specific groups of people in New Bedford and the American whaling industry.

The National Park Service would also sponsor technical training in the fields of resource management and historic preservation. The National Park Service would work with park partners to develop a collection management plan and to develop a universal finding aid for park-related collections. The park staff would include a cadre of resource management professionals to provide technical assistance and advice to local park partners.

The National Park Service would work with the city to develop a visitor parking plan for the park and would encourage the city to limit or prohibit parking on the most historically evocative streets (for example Johnny Cake Hill and Centre Street). The National Park Service would work with local partners to develop a comprehensive system of wayfinding and interpretive wayside panels.

The park, its local partners, and the National Park Service Alaska Regional Office would work with the Iñupiat Heritage Center (formerly known as North Slope Borough Cultural Center) to accomplish mutual goals in the areas of interpretive and educational programming, and documentation of people, materials, and activities associated with both

historical and contemporary whaling on Alaska's North Slope. The National Park Service Alaska Regional Office would work cooperatively with the Inupiat Heritage Center to seek funding through the Department of Interior's budget to facilitate the intent of the park's enabling legislation related to Alaska's North Slope.

The National Park Service would seek the authority to provide preservation and interpretive technical assistance to the Nathan and Polly Johnson House and the Baker-Robinson Whale Oil Refinery (similar to the Rotch-Jones-Duff House) and to accept the donation of properties or interests in properties for historic preservation purposes. Finally, the National Park Service would seek an increase in its development ceiling to address costs associated with implementation of the general management plan.

Other Alternatives Considered

Two other alternatives were considered: Management Option 1, the status quo alternative, would maintain the current management approach at New Bedford Whaling NHP. The National Park Service's primary role would continue to be to bring a national voice and visibility to New Bedford. Through its signature publications and brochures, the National Park Service would bring the story of American whaling from New Bedford to an expanded national audience. The National Park Service would also work with its park partners to facilitate the ongoing coordination of programs and activities related to visitor services, visitor education, and resource protection. The National Park Service would serve to facilitate activities among park partners and would

have a limited role in resource management and visitor services.

Management Option 3 represents the most intensive and extensive National Park Service involvement. In this option, the National Park Service would establish itself as the lead institution among the park's partners and would assume primary responsibility for resource stewardship. The National Park Service's programs and activities would emphasize hands-on, "nuts and bolts" preservation, collection management, and visitor programming, as well as foster stewardship of New Bedford's historic resources through education, interpretation, and training.

Basis for Decision

The Draft GMP/EIS for New Bedford Whaling NHP was developed over a four-year period with meaningful public input. Factors considered in developing the management options and identifying a selected action include:

- the degree to which the park's mission and goals could be met;
- the degree to which the identified planning issues could be resolved;
- the degree to which necessary implementation actions could occur while mitigating/minimizing the associated environmental impacts; and
- the degree to which it could be feasible to implement a management option taking into account costs, staffing and operational requirements, compliance requirements, and the support of the park's partners.

The selected action for the Final GMP is a revised version of Management Option 2, which was presented as the preferred management option in the Draft GMP/EIS. The Draft GMP/EIS was released in October 2000. Subsequently, slight modifications to the preferred management option were made in response to comments made during the public review period. The revised preferred alternative was presented in the Final GMP/Final EIS, published in July 2001, and is the subject of this Record of Decision. The selected action best supports the park's mission and goals, while also providing management direction that effectively fosters resource protection and supports the provision of high-quality visitor experiences.

Alternative 1, the status quo option, would not

- fully achieve the park's mission and goals—there would be numerous deficiencies with respect to resource protection and visitor opportunities;
- address planning issues associated with the park's roles and responsibilities relative to resource protection; clearly define the relationship between the National Park Service and the New Bedford Historical Commission; address rehabilitation of the Corson Block Building; and the need for administrative, classroom, and flexible meeting space; and
- mitigate or minimize environmental impacts associated with the park's current operational and management activity.

Alternative 3 would not:

- find support among park partners, many of whom expressed concern that this approach would effect

the autonomy of many important, pre-existing institutions within the park and would not effectively recognize their unique contributions to the park; demonstrate cost efficiencies, and would cost approximately 50% more than the selected action for operations and would require double the construction costs.

In sum, the overall benefits of the selected action include:

- Support of park partners;
- Expanded NPS role and responsibility relative to historic resource protection;
- Expanded NPS role in the provision of visitor services;
- Collaborative development of orientation program for the park;
- Increased commitments to educational outreach and partnership building;
- Increased access throughout the park through expanded shuttle service, improved directional signage, waysides, and other interpretive media, and improved universal access;
- Criteria for locating and rehabilitating, if necessary, appropriate space within the historic district to accommodate administrative, classroom, and meeting activities; and
- Expanding the park's authorities to provide interpretive and preservation assistance to the Nathan and Polly Johnson House and the Baker-Robinson Whale Oil Refinery.

Measures to Minimize Impacts and Address Public Concerns

The environmental consequences of the selected action and the other alternatives were fully documented in the draft GMP/EIS and in the Final GMP/Final EIS. All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm that could result from the implementation of the selected action have been identified and incorporated as described in the Final GMP/Final EIS. Due to the programmatic nature of the plan, development projects will be reviewed as necessary for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and other applicable laws and regulations as soon as possible prior to project implementation. Actions to minimize impacts include using already disturbed areas as much as possible where development is planned, avoiding sensitive resources, using sustainable design techniques, mitigating resource damage through careful implementation planning procedures, phasing, timing, and other related actions.

The public review period for the Draft GMP/EIS ended on December 1, 2000. A number of substantial comments were addressed in the final plan. Public comment on the Draft GMP/EIS and NPS response is included in Appendix J of the Final GMP/EIS. Most comments were favorable and supported the selected action.

The no-action period on the Final GMP/EIS ended on August 1, 2001, more than thirty (30) days after the publication of a notice of availability in the Federal Register.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The environmentally preferable alternative is the one that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment. It also means the alternative that best protects, preserves, and enhances the historic, cultural, and natural resources of the area where the proposed action is to take place. The selected action is the alternative that best fits these definitions.

Facility, parking, and circulation improvements would focus on already disturbed lands and existing routes and would be developed in a manner that protects cultural resource values. By virtue of the urban nature of the park, new development would be limited to previously disturbed lands. Efforts to make key buildings within the park universally accessible would follow historic preservation standards and guidelines.

Non-Impairment

One of the park's primary roles is to provide advice and assistance to park partners to enhance resource protection. Given the conceptual nature of the general management plan and the collaborative management approach of the park, there are no proposed National Park Service actions that would result in the impairment of park resources. The cumulative activities of the National Park Service and its partners as described in the general management plan should not result in any impairment of park resources. As further actions are taken at the park, more detailed assessment relative to impairment will be undertaken within the context of environmental compliance.

Conclusion

The above factors and considerations adequately support selection of the preferred action as described in the Final General Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement for New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park.

The NPS will continue to work with local, state and other federal officials, the general public, the private sector, and the Congress of the United States to implement the plan.