

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Briefing Statement

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Issue: Cooperating Association Steering Committee, Progress Report

This is an update on the activities of the Cooperating Association Steering Committee (“CASC”) which was constituted by the National Park Service National Leadership Council (“NLC”) in December, 2007 to re-examine the role and function of cooperating associations in the context of a changing NPS and redefine the relationship between the NPS and cooperating associations. This updates the status of the CASC review activities and is tailored to respond to matters contained in the draft 2007 Concessions Management Advisory Board’s (“CMAB”) letter to NPS with respect to cooperating associations (“CA”) and provide further updates to concerns addressed in the April 16, 2008 letter to National Park Service Director, Mary Bomar from the CMAB.

Major Accomplishments

NLC Review of Cooperating Association Draft Principles

During the May 2008 meeting of the NLC, the CASC presented several draft guiding principles with respect to the NPS partnership with cooperating associations. The NLC made recommendations for their revision and requested that the draft principles be submitted for reconsideration and approval at the November 2008 meeting. Once the NLC has approved them, the principles will be shared with the CMAB and other stakeholders.

Topics among the draft principles include:

- CA mission priorities.
- Role clarification among the various commercial and nonprofit partners.
- Approval level for cooperating association agreements.
- Integrated planning for all revenue generation activities and visitor services in parks.
- Improved communication and coordination among park business and non-profit partners.
- Enhanced training for NPS leadership staff.

Cooperating Association Draft Principles in Relation to the CMAB Recommendations

A summary of the draft guiding principles as related to concerns brought to the NPS by the CMAB follows.

1. **The CMAB recommended that there be better communication between NPS programs and management levels to ensure more consistent guidance.** Related to this is a question raised and addressed by the CASC, “How should the various nonprofit and commercial revenue generating partners coordinate to maximize visitor service and minimize competition in the provision of retail sales opportunities and visitor services?”

In response, the CASC made the following recommendations for consideration:

- The NPS encourages integrated planning in parks for all revenue generation and visitor services.
- The NPS encourages parks to have regular communication and coordination among all partners.
- The NPS pledges to work with its non-profit and commercial partners to arrive at reasonable solutions when questions arise.

2. **The CMAB recommended that greater accountability be brought to the CA program as it exists in the concessions program.**

In response, the CASC made the following recommendations for consideration:

- The NPS and cooperating associations will work together to identify and implement System-wide standards, tools, and a variety of training opportunities to create and communicate a mutual understanding of what constitutes success in a partnership. Included in this effort will be jointly developed criteria to assist in evaluating the health and success of the partnership including both the business practices and the working relationship.
- Furthermore, a CASC task group is developing a toolbox for managers that will include guidance on understanding cooperating association financial statements and other reporting requirements. The NPS is also considering development of a park-level reporting tool for use by cooperating associations to provide greater accountability and transparency.

3. **The CMAB expressed concern about the expansion by cooperating associations into retail merchandise that has traditionally been provided by concessions.**

In response, the CASC made the following recommendations for consideration:

- The NPS reaffirms that the primary purpose of cooperating associations is to support the educational, scientific, historical, and interpretive activities of the National Park Service. Associations accomplish this primarily through the sales of interpretive and educational books and materials to the public. Management decisions regarding cooperating association operations, retail sales items selection, and other factors shall be based first on accomplishing the primary purpose of cooperating associations, and second, on the potential of profit generation resulting in donations to the NPS.
- An organization that serves the cooperating association function (providing interpretive materials and services) may serve other functions to support the NPS, such as fundraising or a concession operation, only when authorized by the appropriate legal instruments.

In addition, a workgroup has been formed to provide guidance on developing the scope of sales statement in consort with stakeholders such as concessions operators. This group is also addressing the sales item approval process with particular attention to defining appropriate niches for cooperating associations' sales items in the context of concessioner-provided sales in parks.

Other Accomplishments

- Met in person to finalize draft principles July 22-23, Denver, CO for further review and approval by the NLC in November 2008.

Created 5 work groups to develop products and recommendations including:

1. *Superintendent's Toolbox* for CA management.
2. *A Decision-guiding Matrix* to help park managers determine how to identify the appropriate partner organizations to accomplish park goals.
3. *Scope of Sales* to provide guidance on sales related activities of CAs.

4. *Revenue Sharing* to provide guidance to superintendents whose parks are part of a multi-park CA and explain how they share revenues between cost centers (e.g. parks, agencies, programs).
 5. *Integrated Visitor Services Strategy* as a tool for coordinating all retail service providers in a park.
- Developed new paradigm for CAs based on functions instead of models. The group developed a new paradigm approach that would encourage and enable parks to have the flexibility and tools to put together the types of organizations that would best meet their tailored needs. The idea of a single model for all cooperating associations was dropped and replaced with the idea of thinking of a cooperating association as one of many functions that an organization provides and ensures that these are authorized and managed with the appropriate legal instrument. Conversely, a park may prefer to have a separate partner for each function such as a friends group or a cooperating association.
 - Worked with the Business Management Group, Office of the Comptroller, to develop a description of the tangible & intangible benefits of cooperating associations.

Next Steps

November	A presentation updating the NLC on the progress of the CASC recommendations will be made the week of November 17, 2008.
October-December	Revise DO-32, as necessary Develop draft Superintendents' Toolbox to include information on designating, managing, assessing the success of, and troubleshooting the cooperating association partnership. The toolbox will contain several references for dialoguing with retail partners to create a more collaborative, communicative and transparent working environment.
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