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## **DIRECTOR'S ORDER #52C: PARK SIGNS**

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Director

**Effective Date:** September 29, 2003

**Sunset Date:** September 29, 2008

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### **1. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Director's Order, and the companion Sign Standards Reference Manual, is to establish and implement standards for the planning, design, fabrication, installation, inventory, and maintenance of outdoor signs for national parks. Signs addressed in the standards include motorist guidance signs both in, and leading to, parks; traffic regulatory signs; park and facility identification signs; and other signs relating to safety, wayfinding, resource protection, interpretation, and general park information.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

The National Park Service is currently responsible for over 83 million acres visited annually by nearly 300 million people. This responsibility includes assisting in the movement of those visitors along 8,000 miles of roads and 14,000 miles of trails in a manner that ensures their

convenience and their safety, and the protection of the natural and historic features they come to enjoy. Because signs are the most frequently used method of communicating with park visitors, they are one of the principal tools used in addressing this charge. It is estimated that the National Park Service has as many as 800,000 signs. However, despite the importance of signs and their monetary value, the Service has not clearly designated who has Servicewide responsibility for them.

As early as 1920, the Service issued sign standards. The standards were periodically updated and eventually replaced, first in 1940, again in 1972, and once again in 1988. The 1998 guidelines focused on highway signs and did not address the full range of sign types that parks typically need. Since the early 1990s, efforts have been underway to establish new and more comprehensive sign standards.

With the recent focus on creating a stronger and more consistent graphic identity for the Service, and on ensuring that it is viewed as one organization (see Director's Order#52A), it is important that these efforts be intensified and result in new and improved sign standards as soon as practicable. It is also important that Servicewide responsibility for the promulgation and application of these standards be clearly identified. This Director's Order and companion Reference Manual replace all previous existing guidelines related to NPS signs.

### **3. AUTHORITY TO ISSUE THIS DIRECTOR'S ORDER**

General Authority to issue this Director's Order and its associated reference manual is contained in 16 U.S.C. 1 through 4 (the National Park Service Organic Act) and the delegations of authority contained in part 245 of the Department of the Interior Manual. As is the case with all components of the NPS directives system, this order is intended only to improve the internal management of the NPS and it is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or equity by a party against the United States, its departments, agencies, instrumentalities or entities, its officers or employees, or any other person.

### **4. GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

From its earliest days, the National Park Service has relied on shared standards to ensure that its services and facilities are appropriate, consistent, and of good quality. One of the most successful sets of NPS standards is also one of its oldest. Shortly after the Service was created, Director Stephen Mather issued the Uniform Regulations of 1920. The standards required that all NPS rangers – no matter their location – would appear in uniforms of the same design. As a result of Mather's vision, the agency gained one of its most recognizable and enduring symbols. Equally important, park personnel were henceforth afforded the respect and authority that derives from the consistency of their dress and its association with the National Park Service.

The principles that underlie the NPS uniform program recognize the value of unity and the power of consistency – qualities that must also guide the development of new NPS sign standards. Like uniforms, signs that are distinctive and consistent in their appearance are recognized as an official voice of the agency. They speak with the authority that signs must have

to be effective. Like park rangers, such signs also speak with a familiar voice. Visitors who travel from park to park are greeted by a graphic language that they come to know and understand. Communication is more assured, more rapid, and more effective. Furthermore, visitors are reminded that individual parks are part of a larger organization with common practices and shared purposes.

In addition to providing signs that are more authoritative, more functional, and more representative of a single organization, common standards offer other advantages. Costs associated with repetitive sign design can be reduced or even eliminated. Fabrication costs can be lowered by taking advantage of mass production and purchasing. Maintenance costs are reduced by limiting material choices to those with the greatest durability. Sign planning and acquisition can be simplified by the use of standardized procedures that are supported by specialized software and internet applications. These same technologies can be used to digitally archive and access park sign plans and sign layouts for use in inventory, maintenance, and replacement efforts.

## **5. PROGRAM GOALS**

NPS sign program management should result in signs that:

- Offer clear, concise, and consistent communications to park visitors while not intruding on natural and historic settings.
- Maximize the public's convenience and safety and reduce the Service's liability exposure by ensuring compliance with pertinent federal regulations and principles of sound engineering and communication.
- Build upon, but are not bound by, NPS design traditions.
- Strengthen the NPS public identity and perception as one organization by reflecting current NPS graphic design standards.
- Are appropriate in appearance, size, and material to a wide range of park environments.
- Allow changes as park communication needs and other circumstances change.
- Are easy to acquire, maintain, and replace, and are reasonably priced.
- Comply with NPS's commitment to rely more on standardized design.

## **6. DEPLOYMENT LIMITATIONS**

Once a procurement system has been set up, superintendents are expected to convert park signs to the new standards to the extent permitted by available funding. However, in accordance with Director's Order #52A, existing stocks will be used until exhausted. Also, nothing in this policy will affect the continued use of existing entrance and other identity signs that have historic significance. Use of the standards in cultural landscapes, historic districts, and backcountry and wilderness areas will be moderated by the special nature of these areas and in accordance with established policies and practices. These standards are not generally intended to be applied to signs installed in parks by other government agencies, concessioners, and lessees of historic properties, although this may be granted or required by superintendents. Administrative mechanisms will be developed to allow for regional and park input in guiding a national sign program.

## **7. RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **7.1 Associate Director, Park Planning, Facilities, and Lands**

The Associate Director will:

- Issue an NPS Sign Standards Manual (Reference Manual 52C) to provide detailed information on specific requirements and specifications for implementing a consistent sign program for the National Park Service.
- Authorize and approve periodic updates and additions to the NPS Sign Standards Manual as changes in needs, resources, technology, and other circumstances require.
- Authorize Servicewide training to ensure that the sign standards are well understood and properly employed.
- Report on NPS accomplishments in meeting Strategic Plan goals related to signs.

### **7.2 Regional Directors**

All regional directors will:

- Implement NPS Sign Program policies, establish clear regional signage goals, develop work plans to facilitate the accomplishment of those goals, and hold park managers accountable for implementing effective sign programs in their respective areas.
- Designate and support a Regional Sign Program Coordinator.
- Ensure that park managers establish and maintain an active sign program in their respective areas, including the designation of a park sign coordinator, and the development of a park sign plan.
- Conduct region-wide evaluations of parks' progress in implementing NPS sign standards.

### **7.3 Harpers Ferry Center (HFC)**

The Center Manager will:

- Develop NPS Sign Standards that meet the Program Goals of section 5, above and, upon approval by the Associate Director, disseminate them as the NPS Sign Standards Manual.
- Provide periodic updates and additions to the manual as needed.
- Designate, support, and directly supervise the NPS Sign Program Manager.
- Develop, issue, and oversee contracts for the manufacture and supply of signs to parks.
- Assist individual parks in establishing and maintaining comprehensive sign plans consistent with the NPS Sign Standards Manual.
- Compile data and provide an annual report on achieving target goals for the NPS sign program.

### **7.4 Park Facility Management Division**

The Division will:

- Provide technical guidance on traffic control devices and motorist guidance signs in support of the NPS Sign Program, including assisting in periodic updates of the NPS Standards Manual.
- Assist with Servicewide training to ensure that the sign standards are well understood and properly employed.
- Serve as liaison with the Federal Highway Administration in securing technical traffic engineering and safety expertise and in maintaining ongoing FWHA approval of NPS sign standards.

## 7.5 Superintendents

All superintendents will:

- Establish and maintain an active sign program in their respective areas, including the designation of a park sign coordinator and the development of a park sign plan as described in Reference Manual 52C.
- Implement NPS Sign Program policies by utilizing the NPS Sign Program Standards in the planning, design, and acquisition of all signs within their purview, unless an exception has been granted by their regional director in consultation with the National Sign Program Manager.
- Prepare an evaluation of their park's progress in implementing NPS sign standards.

## 8. OTHER SOURCES OF GUIDANCE

Most of the following sources of guidance are available through the NPS policy web site at [www.nps.gov/policy](http://www.nps.gov/policy). Some of those in the list below may not yet be issued at the time this Director's Order is approved. Their status will also be indicated on the policy web site.

**8.1** The following orders and directives guide the National Park Service in the development and implementation of sign standards:

- National Park Service Management Policies (especially section 9.3.1.1).
- Director's Order #52A: Communicating the National Park Service Mission. This is the first in a series of Director's Orders aimed at helping to explain the NPS identity and its mission. In addition to Directors Order #52C, the others are:
  - o Director's Order #52B: Graphic Design Standards.
  - o Director's Order #52D: Use of the Arrowhead Symbol.

**8.2** The following directives include information relating to NPS sign design and construction:

- Director's Order #50C: Public Risk Management Program.
- Director's Order #87A: Park Roads and Parkways.
- Director's Order #42: Accessibility for People with Disabilities in National Park Service Facilities, Programs, and Services.
- The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

- The manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) published by the Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation.
- NPS Implementation Plan (September 1998) prepared in response to the NAPA report “Strengthening the National Park Service Construction Program.”
- 23 U.S.C. 402, Highway Safety Program; 23 U.S.C. 204, Federal lands Highway Program; and additional guidelines as provided by the Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation.
- 18 U.S.C. 4124, relating to signs purchased from Federal Prison Industries (UNICOR).

----- *End of Director's Order* -----