United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
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Policy Memorandum 11-02

To: National Leadership Council

From: Director

Subject: Social Media – Interim Policy

The effective use of social media in support of the National Park Service's mission is an important skill set in the 21st century. Equally important, we must have a policy in place that allows us to take advantage of expanding social media communication opportunities while protecting parks, programs, and employees from undue risk, liability, and expense. This memorandum is a vital first step in that direction; it establishes an interim policy on the official and non-official use of social media and social networking services. It takes effect immediately.

This policy equips us to more effectively implement portions of Director's Orders #6: Interpretation and Education; #52A: Communicating the National Park Service Mission; and #75A: Civic Engagement and Public Involvement. The Office of Communications will coordinate the development and implementation of social media policy; it will ensure that this interim policy is cross-referenced elsewhere, as appropriate, and incorporated into Director's Order #70: Internet and Intranet Publishing.

This policy must be used in conjunction with the *Department of the Interior Social Media Policy* and its related *Social Media Handbook.* Each of those documents provides in-depth and Department-wide guidance, as well as a more comprehensive listing of Federal policies and regulations related to the use of social media. This NPS Policy Memorandum and all documents and forms it references are available for download at http://inside.nps.gov/socialmedia unless otherwise specified.

A. Key Definitions. For the purposes of this policy:

"Social media" refers to a means of communication in which people use web and mobile-based tools and platforms to publish, converse, and share user-generated content online. Social media can take many different forms, including social networks, blogs, vlogs, wikis, podcasts, social bookmarks, and online forums.

"Social networking" refers to an online service used to reflect social relations and communities, and to connect individuals and organizations with common interests. These services often provide access to a range of web and mobile-based interactions such as Instant Messaging, email,

and video and photo sharing. Examples of social networking sites include Facebook, Myspace, and LinkedIn.

"Official use" of social media and social networking tools means the establishment and use of a third-party social networking or social media service as an official means of communication or engagement on behalf of the NPS. Official use is not defined as visiting third-party social media or social networking websites as part of one's official capacity for purely research or informational purposes, which is governed by the *NPS Rules of Behavior for Use of Information Technology*. Nor does it include use of social media and social networking tools for strictly personal use outside of the workplace.

B. Scope. This policy applies to all forms of social media content and services that include, for example, media sharing, blogging and microblogging, social networking, document and data sharing repositories, social bookmarking, widgets, and location-based social networks.

C. Official Use of Social Media and Social Networking by the NPS. The NPS encourages parks, programs, and offices to consider using social media tools to augment their communications efforts when there is a legitimate business case to do so and they have the capacity to maintain the presence or services. In accordance with Director's Order #70, managers are responsible and accountable for their official web presences, including those on third-party websites and those that use third-party services or tools. Managers should carefully weigh their options with the help of their communications, interpretation, web, and other pertinent staff when deciding whether social media is the right tool to meet their goals.

Managers must be vigilant to ensure that the NPS's guiding principles (see section D and E below), derived from principles issued by the DOI, are always adhered to.

D. Guiding Principles for Official Use of Social Media. When acting in their *official* capacity on behalf of the NPS, NPS employees must abide by the following guiding principles for official use of social media:

1) Do not discuss in a publicly accessible forum any Federal Government information that is not public information. The discussion of sensitive, proprietary, or classified information is strictly prohibited. This rule applies even in circumstances where password or other privacy controls are implemented. Failure to comply may result in fines or disciplinary action.
2) Third-party sites must not be the only place where official NPS information can be found. Any official information posted to a third-party site must also be provided on NPS.gov.
3) NPS employees and supervisors are responsible for the content published by employees representing the NPS in an official capacity on social media sites. Employees must assume that any content posted is in the public domain, will be available and discoverable for a long period of time, and will be published or discussed in the media.
4) If using social media tools to communicate with the public is not one of your duties, do not let it interfere with those duties.

5) Know and follow DOI and other Executive Branch conduct guidance, such as the *Internet Acceptable Use Policy, the policy on Limited Personal Use of Government Office Equipment*, and the *Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch*.

   - Do not engage in vulgar or abusive language or personal attacks, or use offensive terms targeting individuals or groups.
   - Do not endorse, or imply endorsement of, commercial products, services, or entities.
   - Do not endorse political parties, candidates, or groups.
   - Do not engage in lobbying campaigns or participate in events designed to support or oppose pending legislation.

E. Guiding Principles for Non-official/Personal Use of Social Media. NPS employees, or those working on behalf of the NPS, who use social media and social networking services and tools for strictly personal use outside of the workplace obviously do not require approval to do so. However, we must recognize that these types of tools can sometimes blur the line between our professional and personal lives. Employees are reminded that, as representatives of the NPS, they must take the above principles into consideration when participating in these services at any time, particularly when identifying themselves as employees of the NPS or when context might lead to that conclusion.

Any activity using Government equipment (including access to the Internet) is governed by DOI guidance on the personal use of Government office equipment, including the *Internet Acceptable Use Policy* and the policy on *Limited Personal Use of Government Office Equipment*.

Employees should abide by these guiding principles when using social media services in a *non-official* capacity:

1) Do not discuss in a publicly accessible forum any NPS-related information that is not public information. The discussion of sensitive, proprietary, or classified information is strictly prohibited. This rule applies even in circumstances where password or other privacy controls are implemented. Failure to comply may result in fines or disciplinary action.

2) Be aware of your association with the NPS when participating in online social networks. If you identify yourself as an NPS employee or have a public-facing position for which your NPS association is known to the general public, ensure that your profile and related content (even if it is of a personal and not an official nature) is consistent with how you wish to present yourself as an NPS professional, appropriate to the public trust associated with your position, and consistent with existing standards such as the *Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch*. Remember: there should be no expectation of privacy when using social media; what is posted can go far beyond your circle of friends.

3) When in doubt, stop. Do not post until you are certain that your post will be considered protected speech that does not violate DOI and Executive Branch conduct guidelines and laws such as the Hatch Act. Also, consider adding a disclaimer to your social networking

profile, personal blog, or other online presences that clearly states that the opinions or views expressed are yours alone.

4) If you are unsure about a post relating to the NPS, discuss your proposed post with your supervisor and ask for guidance.

F. Procedures. The following steps are required to begin any NPS social media effort:

1) **Identify Approved Sites and Services.** The NPS may only use third-party social media sites or services that have a DOI-approved Terms of Service (TOS) agreement, a DOI privacy impact assessment (PIA) and, when required, a DOI system of records notice. A list of sites and services that have been approved by the DOI and the NPS is at http://inside.nps.gov/socialmedia.

   Parks or programs wanting to use a site or service that does not have a DOI-approved TOS agreement should contact their directorate web coordinator, who will review the request with the NPS Service-wide POC.

2) **Develop a Social Media Strategy.** All NPS web presences, including those on third-party sites or using third-party services, must coordinate with and adhere to applicable park/program and Service-wide communications plans.

   Each park/program seeking to use social media tools must develop a social media strategy—ideally as part of a communications, interpretative, or civic engagement plan—to ensure that the most appropriate tools are chosen and the effort is adequately resourced. The social media strategy must address each of the following topics (which are further described on the Social Media Strategy Form in Appendix A):

   a) Purpose

   b) Goals

   c) Audience

   d) Implementation

   e) Evaluation

   The *NPS Social Media Tools and Strategies Guide,* available at http://inside.nps.gov/socialmedia, provides guidance on the types of social media tools and services and how to determine the most appropriate tools to achieve specific communications goals.

   The guide also outlines key questions to address in creating and implementing a strategy, including audience identification, metrics, content creation, and engaging users on a regular and recurring basis.

3) **Consult Regional/Directorate Web Coordinator.** To leverage resources and avoid duplication and user confusion, park/program web coordinators must collaborate with their directorate web coordinator to determine whether existing NPS social media or other efforts accomplish the same or similar goals.

4) **Social Media Strategy Approval and Submission**. The social media strategy must be:

a) reviewed and approved by the superintendent/manager, and

b) submitted by the park/program web coordinator to the NPS Social Media Register at http://inside.nps.gov/socialmedia, using the social media strategy form shown in Appendix A.

5) **Establishing New Sites.**

a) **Web Coordinators.** Park/program web coordinators should be:

i. the primary point of contact for establishing each new social media account;

ii. granted administrative rights to all sites, even if they are not the primary user;

iii. responsible for administering and coordinating activities across all park/program digital presences; and

iv. responsible for maintaining a list of employees who are authorized by the superintendent/manager to post to each site.

b) **Account Application.** Some sites require an application process to access the DOI-approved Terms of Service; check the implementation guides at http://inside.nps.gov/socialmedia for detailed information about setting up new accounts and for guidance specific to each site or service.

c) **NPS Brand.** All NPS social media presences must be branded with NPS design elements provided by the NPS Office of Communications as those elements become available and posted at http://inside.nps.gov/socialmedia.

d) **Register Your Site.** Once established, the URL for each social media site must be added to the NPS Social Media Register.

- Sites that are not registered may be terminated.
- All existing social media presences must be registered within 60 days of the date of this memorandum. Failure to do so could result in termination of the site.

6) **Periodic Review.** Social media strategies must be organic and flexible to accommodate new needs, priorities, or a project's maturation. They should be reviewed regularly for effectiveness and to determine if new social media tools and techniques may better fulfill communications goals or augment existing efforts.

G. NPS Official Social Media Register. The NPS Office of Communications will maintain the Social Media Register as the catalog of NPS presences on third-party social media sites and services. The Register will be posted on NPS.gov at http://www.nps.gov/socialmedia to provide a public record of official NPS communications channels.

----------*End of Policy Memorandum*----------

Appendix A: Social Media Strategy Form
(revised: 12/09/11)

Before completing this form, please review the *NPS Social Media Tools and Strategies Guide* as well as the implementation guides for each DOI-approved social media site/service, available at http://inside.nps.gov/socialmedia.

Park/Program:

Your Name:

Title/Position:

Email:

Phone:

Your park/program social media strategy must address each of the following:

- **Purpose**: What do you hope to achieve through use of this site(s)/service(s)? How is this part of your overall communications/interpretive/civic engagement strategy?
- **Goals:** What specific outcomes do you expect?
- **Audience:** Who are your target audiences? List each social media site/service you wish to use and explain why it is appropriate for this audience(s).
- **Implementation:** Who will establish and maintain the site(s)? (Name all employees who will be authorized to post to the site or have administrative access). How frequently will you post? What type of content will you share?
- **Evaluation:** When and how will you evaluate the success of your site(s)? Clearly state your evaluation timeline and techniques.

Superintendent/Manager Approval

_____ _____
Signature Date

_____
Print Name