

# Planning for a Future National Park System

*A Foundation for the 21st Century*



**2012 National Park System Advisory Board Report**



# National Park System Advisory Board



*Citizen advisors chartered by Congress to help the National Park Service care for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.*

Tony Knowles  
Anchorage, Alaska  
CHAIRMAN

December 3, 2012

Paul Bardacke  
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Director Jonathan Jarvis  
National Park Service  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Linda J. Bilmes  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Dear Director Jarvis,

Leonore Blitz  
Washington, DC

The National Park System Advisory Board is pleased to transmit "Planning for a Future National Park System—A Foundation for the 21st Century," a report developed by our planning committee and adopted by the Board on November 29, 2012.

Judy Burke  
Grand Lake, Colorado

In 2010, you asked the Board to offer principles and guidelines for a National Park System plan. Our initial report was adopted in June 2011 and was reflected in the first goal of the NPS 2011 "A Call to Action" initiative: *Identify a national system of parks and protected sites that fully represents our natural resources and the national cultural experience.* Our current report offers substantially more detail to support the next steps envisioned in the 2011 strategy: *Work with communities and partners to create a comprehensive National Park System plan that delineates the ecological regions, cultural themes, and stories of diverse communities that are not currently protected and interpreted.* The text of our report includes links to appendices that reflect analysis of gaps in representation of ecological systems and cultural resources, new park partnership models, large landscape-scale conservation, and urban engagement.

Milton Chen  
Nicasio, California

Rita Colwell  
College Park, Maryland

The last Systemwide plan was prepared by the National Park Service in 1972. In this era of rapid environmental and cultural transformation and changes in the characteristics of the American population, we encourage an approach to National Park System planning that involves an ongoing, dynamic process rather than the production of a single document. We believe that the NPS has an outstanding opportunity to be proactive in defining and achieving a vision for its exceptional role in our system of protected areas.

Belinda Faustinos  
Azusa, California

Carolyn Finney  
Berkeley, California

Development of a foundational plan can help the NPS communicate that establishing and maintaining parks and protecting cultural sites are investments in community infrastructure that support broad national priorities: jobs, education, civic engagement, public health, and ecosystem services. These investments are valuable in times of plenty and scarcity—some of our nation's most widely respected and appreciated protected areas were established during previous eras of severe fiscal challenges.

Ronald M. James  
Carson City, Nevada

We hope that this report will prove beneficial to the NPS as work continues to develop a National Park System plan that will carry NPS leadership forward into a next century of conservation and heritage preservation.

Gretchen Long  
Wilson, Wyoming

Sincerely,

Margaret Wheatley  
Provo, Utah

Tony Knowles,  
Chair, National Park System Advisory Board

Gretchen Long  
Chair, Planning Committee





Golden Gate National Recreation Area. NPS / DAN NG

*National Park System units, designations, and programs can be cornerstones  
and catalysts in an integrated system of protected areas.*

# Contents

<b>1. Background and Context</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Planning for the Future	1
1.2 Articulating a Vision	2
1.3 The Current System	3
1.4 Plan Purposes	5
1.5 Past Practices and Future Directions	6
<b>2. Create an Integrated System That More Fully Represents Our Heritage</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Targets	9
2.2 Natural Resource Representation	10
2.3 Cultural Resource Representation	11
<b>3. Sustain the Integrity of Parks, Historic Sites, and Other Protected Areas</b>	<b>15</b>
3.1 Large Landscape-Scale Conservation	15
3.2 NPS Units and Partnership Models	17
3.3 Boundaries	19
<b>4. Improve Connections for Urban Populations</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>5. Build Institutional Capacity in NPS for Systems Planning and Partnerships</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>6. Conclusion</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Summary of Major Recommendations</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Committee Members</b>	<b>39</b>





Grand Canyon National Park. NPS / DAN NG

*Planning for the future of the parks and protected areas should begin by engaging all interested individuals, groups, and levels of government to define a collaborative vision.*

# 1. Background and Context

## 1.1 Planning for the Future

National Park Service (NPS) responsibilities for managing parks and programs have grown over the past century in response to opportunities rather than a clear design. The most recent evidence of a “system plan” prepared by the NPS appeared in 1972. In 1988 the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) developed its own plan for the National Park System. The National Park System Advisory Board (NPSAB) Planning Committee noted that most large, complex organizations make much more frequent and substantial commitments to long-range systematic planning.

The National Park System Advisory Board established a planning committee in 2010, including 15 members with extensive experience in natural resources, cultural resources, park management, and urban issues. The committee’s report on principles and guidelines for a system plan was adopted in June 2011 and was reflected in the first goal in the NPS Director’s 2011 “A Call to Action”: *Identify a national system of parks and protected sites (rivers, heritage areas, trails, and landmarks) that fully represents our natural resources and the nation’s cultural experience.... work with communities and partners to create a comprehensive National Park System plan that delineates the ecological regions, cultural themes, and stories of diverse communities that are not currently protected and interpreted.* The Board was asked to expand on its previous work and support the next steps in developing a foundation for system planning.

Rapid changes in our world—natural systems, cultural resources, population, technology, science, and scholarship—all suggest an urgent need to have clear direction for the National Park Service role in conserving our nation’s heritage.

Planning for the future of the National Park Service needs to consider a wide range of technical and financial assistance programs and other designations such as national heritage areas, wild and scenic rivers, trails,

and landmarks, as well as the areas that the NPS directly manages. Although the National Park System is defined in current law as the almost 400 units managed by the NPS, the committee believes that to meet the challenges of the future, the NPS units, other protective designations, and programs must work together to achieve a common purpose. We also anticipate that new models of parks featuring more partnerships and a mix of land ownerships will be needed in the next century.

Planning for the future should identify themes missing in the current system but allow and encourage initiatives from local communities and national constituencies to find the best strategy to conserve the resources they consider important.

A national park plan should be a continuing, dynamic process rather than the production of a single document. The process should be interactive and iterative. It should promote conservation at the landscape scale considering integration of natural, historic, cultural resources, and human communities. It should emphasize connections: between people and their natural and cultural heritage, between parks and programs, and across habitats and larger landscapes to allow for adaptation to environmental change, and between urban populations, and cultural sites as well as parks.

Opportunity and risk assessments—evaluation of uncertainties, the potential for losses, and the probability of occurrence and likely impacts, along with restoration possibilities—should inform planning, and management should be adaptive. National Park System units, designations, and programs can be cornerstones and catalysts in an integrated system of protected areas. Corridors and partnerships with adjacent landowners and managers are important tools to promote meaningful conservation beyond traditional boundaries.

Open space and recreational needs of disadvantaged communities need to be

addressed throughout the process. The NPS should encourage the development of community capacity to engage on a long-term basis in identifying important natural and cultural resources near home, finding ways to protect them, and promoting access to existing parks.

The NPS should communicate more effectively that establishing and maintaining parks and protecting cultural sites are investments in community infrastructure that support broad national priorities. Parks, historic preservation, and heritage areas generate jobs, promote education, enhance civic engagement, support public health, and provide a host of valuable ecosystem services. These investments are valuable in times of plenty and scarcity: some of our nation's most widely respected and appreciated protected areas were established during previous eras of severe fiscal challenges.

Time is of the essence. To address the rapid pace of change, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) is currently proceeding with a plan for strategic growth of the refuge system. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Forest Service (USFS), and other federal agencies also are making progress with their own systems planning efforts. We recommend that the NPS begin work immediately on its own system planning process—in coordination with a variety of partners, either by using available authorities or by seeking new legislative direction.

Throughout our discussions the committee considered the term “parks” to include historic sites and cultural resources. The term “landscape” also encompasses the ecological and cultural context for historic and cultural sites, as well as the ecosystems and human communities surrounding those sites.

The committee endorses recommendations by the Second Century Commission to substantially condense the number of different titles for park system units, and to clarify public understanding that regardless of official designation, all areas managed by the NPS are part of the same system of national parks.

Our findings and recommendations are organized by four major concepts:

**1. Create an integrated system of national parks, heritage areas, programs, landmarks, and protected areas that more fully represents and safeguards our nation's natural and cultural heritage.**

**2. Sustain the integrity of parks, historic sites, and other protected areas by creating corridors to link habitats, and promote compatible uses of surrounding lands and by planning for risk management and adaptation to respond to a changing environment.**

**3. Improve connections for urban populations with the recreation, public health, economic, cultural history, civic engagement, and other benefits of parks and NPS assistance programs.**

**4. Build institutional capacity in the National Park Service for systems planning to establish a vision, identify goals, and select strategies to meet the challenges of the future.**

---

## 1.2 Articulating a Vision

Planning for the future of the parks and protected areas should begin by engaging all interested individuals, groups, and levels of government to define a collaborative vision. The National Park System Advisory Board's vision for the future is based on the principles of creating a more integrated system of parks and programs, sustaining the integrity of these assets, and improving connections for all Americans.

As a starting point for further discussion of a vision we suggested:

*“A national system of parks, protected areas, and programs that fully represents and adequately protects our heritage of natural and historic resources, reflects the breadth of our nation's cultural experience, and provides opportunities for education and recreation that inspires and engages our population, leaving an enduring legacy for future generations.”*



The committee developed several ideas for expanding on that broad vision statement and the implications of a system that “fully represents” our national heritage:

*“Envision a conservation system that is large and connected enough for organisms to adapt and evolve to changing environmental conditions and sustain the integrity, diversity, and health of the ecological and evolutionary processes and associated ecological services in the parks. Such a system would help ensure resilience in the face of climate change, land use change, and other environmental stressors.”*

As noted by the Science Committee in *Revisiting Leopold*, “The goal should be to steward NPS resources for continuous change that is not yet fully understood, in order to preserve ecological integrity and cultural authenticity, provide visitors with transformative experiences, and form the core of a national conservation land- and seascape.”

As noted by the Cultural Resources Subcommittee: “As a steward of historic places, the NPS has opportunities to help the American public engage in critical thinking about the past and about how the past shapes the present and future. For many engaged in historic preservation, telling more honest, inclusive stories is a beginning. The real prize is making historic places major sites where Americans can meet for conversations about where we, as a society, a nation, and communities, can and should go from here.”

The committee’s urban group noted: “Together the NPS, its partners, sister agencies, stakeholders, and community members can play a significant role in ensuring that densely populated diverse communities across the country become mobilized to support connections to parks and open spaces.”

The committee suggests that in elaborating on a vision statement, the NPS consider state historic preservation plans that highlight the ideas of creating a stewardship ethic and cultivating shared values recognizing the linkage between the cultural and natural environments. State wildlife action plans that describe the importance

of habitat connectivity also may provide useful ideas in elaborating on a vision for the NPS in the next century.

---

### 1.3 The Current System

Congress has described our national parks as a cumulative expression of a single national heritage. The system includes a collection of national treasures, but a quick review of the system’s characteristics and distribution reveals some apparent deficiencies:

- National Park System units encompass 3.7 percent of the United States, but only 1.4 percent of the contiguous 48 states. Almost half of the National Park System acres are in Alaska.
- They include minimal marine representation.
- Most of the acreage is western. Ninety-one percent of the acreage is west of the 98th meridian (73 percent without Alaska and Hawai’i).
- Thirty-three states have less than one percent of their area in national parks.
- Eight ecoregions have no representation in the National Park System.
- The majority of underprotected ecological systems are found in low elevations and on moderate- to high-productivity soils.
- Representing one example of an ecosystem type does not necessarily reflect contemporary ideas of the need for redundancy and resilience to address climate change, the rapid pace of development, and other pressures.
- When consideration is given to other protected public lands, the same pattern emerges of substantial concentration in the west, and relative scarcity in the eastern states.
- The list of national parks by historic significance category highlights some



Augusta Canal National Heritage Area. DANIELLE SEWARD



obvious discrepancies in representation: numerous battlefields and presidential homes, few sites specifically representing migration and immigration, social movements, education, arts, and science.

- Tools readily available for identifying topics represented in the system do not necessarily reflect the important dimensions of chronology, geographic region, race, ethnicity, class, and gender.
- Although recent initiatives have made progress in broadening representation, the current system of national parks and historic landmarks reflects the “traditional” focus on iconic scenery and architecturally remarkable buildings, often associated with individuals who were wealthy or politically influential.
- The current inventory does not adequately reflect the full breadth of the American experience, or offer opportunities to forge lasting connections with a changing population.
- The NPS presence in major metropolitan areas is limited. Forty of the 50 largest metropolitan areas have a site managed by the NPS within 50 miles, but many of these are small historic properties with limited staff and program capacity. In 10 of the largest 50 metropolitan areas, the NPS has no site within 50 miles.

Additional details on the analysis of park distribution by state prepared by committee member Denis P. Galvin appears as Appendix A (go to [www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm](http://www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm)).

The NPS should communicate to the public the strengths in the current system and the gaps that are evident in representation of natural and cultural features and in connections with America’s changing demographic characteristics.

## 1.4 Plan Purposes

A National Park System plan is often assumed to focus on the identification of “gaps” and opportunities to establish new park areas. This is only one of several potential purposes for such a planning effort. We recommend that system planning be designed to achieve the following:

- (a) Highlight the importance of parks and other protected areas for their inherent conservation and historical values as well as for contributing to other national priorities such as sustainable economic growth, education, civic engagement, and public health.
- (b) Clarify the distinctive role of the National Park Service in the broader network of areas protected by other agencies, state, local, and tribal governments, and the private sector.
- (c) Expand appreciation for the capability of the NPS to provide educational experiences and to stimulate civic dialogue.
- (d) Engage and expand the constituency for national parks, NPS programs, and conservation.
- (e) Identify a range of tools and techniques for addressing gaps in protected area representation considering programs as well as federal management designations.
- (f) Identify current and potential threats to conservation goals.
- (g) Support strategies for addressing rapid changes in the environment as well as demographic, economic, and other characteristics.
- (h) Support models of collaboration and partnership that enable the NPS to increase impact and broaden engagement.
- (i) Articulate the opportunities for ecological restoration to contribute to conservation goals and place-based educational opportunities, especially in urban areas.



## 1.5 Past Practices and Future Directions

We found several points of contrast between current or past practices and new or future concepts that should characterize system planning. Some of the “past” practices date back several decades, and some of the “future” directions reflect work already in progress. This section is intended to highlight contrasts recognizing that most of these ideas deserve much more detailed and nuanced narrative for next phases of system planning.

---

Past: National parks are established to protect iconic scenery, architecturally distinguished buildings, and to promote tourism.

**Future:** *National parks, as well as NPS programs, conserve lived-in landscapes, protect biological complexity, enhance ecosystem services, conserve cultural heritage, promote civic engagement, and provide more equitable access for diverse populations.*

---

Past: The National Park Service is known to the public as the steward of areas with clear boundaries which define the limits of NPS management authority.

**Future:** *The NPS is an agency of professionals with substantial expertise in resource conservation, historic preservation, and education. It plays a much greater role beyond established park boundaries enabling all Americans to participate in conserving and interpreting the places that they hold dear.*

---

Past: Natural areas should be protected so that they will be free from any evidence of human impacts.

**Future:** *Humans have been influencing the natural environment for thousands of years. Conservation should illuminate how nature influences culture and how culture influences nature.*

Past: Natural areas should be managed to reflect conditions at the time of European contact.

**Future:** *Natural systems are constantly changing, and preservation means allowing natural processes to continue as well as recognizing that the contexts of those processes have changed dramatically in many places.*

---

Past: Protect at least one of everything.

**Future:** *One is not enough: redundancy is needed to prevent catastrophic loss, allow for adaptation to climate change, and other ecological processes and for broader, contextual representation in keeping with the best of current scholarship.*

---

Past: Natural areas and cultural sites can be protected by establishing and securing clear legal boundaries.

**Future:** *Air, water, plants, and wildlife can cross boundary lines with little or no regard for legal authorities; to allow for resiliency and adaptation for climate change, connectivity is critical. Protection of complex ecological systems requires engagement and cooperation at a large landscape scale. So do cultural resources where stories, traditional uses, and important sites are not always easily confined within an administrative boundary and where context is often vulnerable to incompatible uses.*

---

Past: National recognition or designation as a park should be reserved for areas and sites that retain their “pristine” condition.

**Future:** *Restoration of degraded habitats may offer the best available opportunity to provide park experiences and functioning ecosystems, especially in urban areas. Integrity of cultural resources needs to be evaluated in context of the character of the resources, what stories can be illustrated, and what other sites might be available.*

Past: Reflecting what now is recognized to be an outdated view of history, cultural sites most often were designated to commemorate big battles, “great men,” architectural elegance, and American triumphalism.

**Future:** *Our cultural heritage is diverse and complex. NPS programs continue to make advances in reflecting social, economic, and cultural trends and themes, not just politics and war, and must embrace the experiences and perspectives of all Americans, considering race and ethnicity, class, and gender.*

---

Past: Sites were added to the Park System to tell the “correct” story about our history.

**Future:** *Continuing recent initiatives by NPS historians and scholars, sites should be designated and interpreted to embrace historical ambiguities, broad contexts, multiple perspectives, and varied interpretations not only of what happened, but why it matters and what it means in the contemporary context.*

---

Past: Parks should offer interpretation and visitor experiences based only on their “core mission.”

**Future:** *Parks should update their interpretive programs consistent with a contemporary reading of their authorizing legislation to recognize the potential breadth of their resources and opportunities to provide inspiring experiences that touch on many different dimensions of our national story.*

---

Past: Designation of one or two sites important to a specific group provides adequate representation of that part of our national experience.

**Future:** *NPS programs continue to recognize that human experience within our diverse nation is complex and varied over time, cultures, and geography. For example, the American Latino Heritage initiative highlighted that many NPS sites and National Register listings represented the Spanish colonial era, but Latino experience in the past 200 years was largely missing.*

Past: Urban populations need access to park and recreation opportunities, and these can usually be provided by state or local governments.

**Future:** *As a matter of equity, urban populations should have access to national park areas and programs. A strong constituency is needed for support of our national parks and other protected areas highlighting the need to engage urban populations which now often have little, if any, easy access to NPS sites or programs.*

---

Past: The NPS Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) is the most widely recognized way to engage with urban populations, although NPS preservation assistance programs are transforming neighborhoods and providing avenues for urban communities to express and preserve their heritage.

**Future:** *The entire range of NPS programs and authorities including national natural and historic landmarks, heritage areas, historic surveys, preservation assistance, and preservation tax incentives needs to be available to engage with urban populations, especially in the major metropolitan areas without any NPS presence, or where the capacity of the NPS is limited in relation to the service area.*

---

Past: Professionals and experts should identify new parks and other designations.

**Future:** *Science and scholarship are essential, but need to provide support for community action in recommending what should be protected.*

---

Past: The NPS can develop and implement a plan for what the system will look like in 50 or 100 years.

**Future:** *The NPS can offer guidance and a framework, but will take value from initiatives by local communities and national organizations to find creative ways to achieve the desired results.*



Golden Gate National Recreation Area. GGNPC

*Future thematic studies can focus on individual ethnic or other minority groups, but they also can address the stories and experience that may be important to multiple groups and highlight the stories that link us as Americans.*



## 2. Create an Integrated System that More Fully Represents Our Heritage

### 2.1 Targets

Nations throughout the world have identified specific numerical targets for land to be preserved. Several states and regional organizations also have identified numerical goals that should be considered as the NPS embarks on system planning. For example:

- A strategy addressing the 2009 executive order on Chesapeake Bay conservation identified a goal to protect two million additional acres by 2025, including 695,000 acres of forestland of highest value for maintaining water quality. The strategy also aims to increase public access to the Bay and its tributaries by adding 300 new public access sites.
- In 1999 less than three percent of California state waters were in marine protected areas (MPAs), and most of those MPAs were small and lacked clear objectives. Because of a system planning process, by 2013 approximately 16 percent of state waters will be in 124 MPAs that represent and replicate most marine and estuarine habitats and are designed to be ecologically connected.
- A report by Harvard Forest offers “a vision of New England that triples the amount of land remaining free from development; a future in which more than 70 percent of the land across the region would remain forested, punctuated only by waters, wetlands, and farmland.”
- Parks Canada’s system plan focused on protecting representative examples of 39 major landscape types, and would expand the amount of land in national park status from 2.25 percent to about 3.0 percent.
- The international conservation community has adopted specific, numerical targets for biodiversity conservation. Targets adopted in 2010 include:
  - At least halve and, where feasible, bring close to zero the rate of loss of natural habitats, including forests.
  - Establish a conservation target of 17 percent of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10 percent of marine and coastal areas.
  - Restore at least 15 percent of degraded areas through conservation and restoration activities.
  - Make special efforts to reduce the pressures faced by coral reefs.

Some nations have already exceeded these targets. For example, protected areas represent approximately 36 percent of Belize’s terrestrial areas and 13 percent of its marine area.

Targets that identify only a percentage of total land area to be conserved risk leaving out a range of resource types. For example, protecting 10 percent of the land base might encompass many deserts or mountains, but no wetlands. A more desirable target would be to protect at least some specific percent of each major ecosystem or cultural resource type.

Setting conservation targets and defining the role of the National Park Service in the larger network of protected areas is inevitably a task that requires balancing science and scholarship with political feasibility. A recent editorial in the publication *Conservation Biology* argued that science should provide a starting point for that discussion, rather provocatively suggesting:

*“If the conservation community sets protection targets based on preconceived notions of what is socially or politically acceptable or on assumptions of inevitable population and economic growth, we will make very limited headway in stemming extinction. Our task is not to be beaten down by political reality, but to*

*help change it. Nature needs at least 50 percent, and it is time we said so.”*

In developing a system plan, the NPS must identify clear targets looking forward 5, 10, or 50 years. Targets should recognize that success will be the result of engaging partners and not just direct land management by the NPS.

The committee did not attempt to select specific numerical targets, but recommends that they be bold and focus on results like doubling the effectiveness of NPS units and programs.

---

## **2.2 Natural Resource Representation**

The committee observed that a vision, goals, and targets need to be identified before gaps can be clearly identified. Gaps can be defined as the difference between targets and the existing representation of resources. Contemporary ideas about system design also recognize the importance of redundancy and resilience in considering what is “adequately” represented.

The committee found a substantial body of recent research and new mapping capability that helps identify gaps in natural resource representation as well as trends in land uses surrounding parks that indicate vulnerabilities. Gap analysis has played a major role in conservation planning by gathering and analyzing data sets to determine which species or ecosystems represent “gaps” in the current system of conservation areas. Systematic conservation plans such as the ecoregional assessments of The Nature Conservancy took gap analysis one step further by identifying those potential conservation areas to fill the gaps for a particular set of ecological goals.

Many advances in conservation planning methods and tools have occurred over the last decade. Chief among these are better incorporation of ecological processes and functions, expanding these functions to include ecosystem services, better inclusion and understanding of the costs (economic

and otherwise) of conservation actions, improved planning for freshwater and marine ecosystems, incorporating climate change adaptation considerations, new ecological restoration tools, and new approaches to connectivity and planning for multiple objectives.

A recent analysis by the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) shows that 16 percent of the 711 terrestrial ecosystems in the United States are not represented in the National Park System, and 392 (55 percent) have less than five percent of their total area within NPS units. Almost 30 percent (206) have less than five percent of their total area in any protected status. These 206 ecosystems could be considered top priority for future protection, along with the 20 types not now represented in any protected areas. Priority attention also could be directed to areas with multiple resource values: representation as well as the occurrence of threatened or endangered species, high potential for public use, and other factors.

The NPS will need to determine how many different natural feature types should be represented in national park sites and other designations. The answer might reasonably recommend different scales for different regions. The NPS could also focus on areas with relatively high potential for educational opportunities.

Another potential approach to identifying priorities for filling “gaps” is to look for the intersections of underrepresented ecoregions and at-risk species of birds or other wildlife. For example, several previous studies have identified grasslands as poorly represented in the existing system of protected areas and as providing important habitat for several species that are declining. California coastal scrub communities are also an example of an underrepresented resource type that encompasses important habitat for threatened and endangered species. The gulf coast of Texas offers an example of opportunities to protect important habitat and serve other national goals for addressing impacts of storms and climate change on fragile coastal areas.

The committee was invited to consider if the Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC) provide a useful framework for considering representation and gaps. Some of the cooperatives are fully operational, while others are making progress toward an ability to help address the questions outlined in this report. The LCCs seem to be an excellent source of access to available studies and data primarily about natural resources, but do not currently appear to be designed to directly answer specific policy questions about priorities and gaps.

The NPS should apply the classification systems available through the USGS and other sources to identify gaps in natural resource representation. Priorities for new parks should be considered in the context of other protected areas, and opportunities should be pursued to improve habitat connectivity by expanding boundaries and the potential for leverage in large landscape-scale conservation. Planning for the future shape of the system should reflect science documenting that smaller, more isolated areas are more likely to lose species over time, and that human development activity adjacent to parks may have an adverse impact on natural processes that sustain park values.

As observed by the NPSAB Science Committee's report *Revisiting Leopold*, "because ecological and cultural systems are complex, continuously changing and not fully understood, NPS managers and decision makers will need to embrace more fully the precautionary principle as an operating guide. The precautionary principle requires that stewardship decisions reflect science-informed prudence and restraint."

The committee recognizes that the marine environment presents a special set of challenges and opportunities. Our subcommittee report on natural resource representation includes a brief discussion of marine and freshwater ecosystems and gaps, but we recognize the importance of giving these areas special attention as the NPS develops capacity and proceeds with system planning. This attention should consider opportunities to address protection for areas adjacent to coastal parks as

well as the potential for more active NPS engagement in the waters offshore.

A discussion of the principles of ecosystem protection and a detailed analysis of the methods for identifying gaps in natural resource representation by committee members Mike Scott, Craig Groves, and Jodi Hilty appears as Appendix B (go to [www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm](http://www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm)).

---

## 2.3 Cultural Resource Representation

The framework for cultural resources adopted by the NPS in 1994 recognizes eight major themes and at least 39 "topics." These broad contextual themes have many facets that must be considered in light of time, location, ecologies and geography, race and ethnicity, class, gender, and other factors. As with natural resources, if at least one of each resource "type" is a goal for the system, then some agreement needs to be reached on how many types are to be represented. This may require choosing a general category and assembling a group of scholars to recommend what distinctions are important in system design. The American Latino Heritage initiative offers an excellent example of how this might be accomplished.

The NPSAB Planning Committee reviewed the list of parks and designated national historic landmarks by significance topic. We found some obvious differences in representation: 70 parks are identified as significant for Native American heritage (mostly southwestern archeological sites), while only one is identified under the topic of economics. Thirty-five current NPS units are listed as representing presidential sites, and only four are listed as representing education. Further evaluation of representation for NPS units, as well as national historic landmarks and other designations, will require much more detailed analysis of databases that often reflect original listings from many years ago or other information that needs to be updated.





Essex National Heritage Area. NPS

The committee was asked to consider what gaps in the representation of sites of special importance to minority populations merit priority attention as we approach the 2016 NPS centennial. We suggest that this question be considered in a broad context of the thematic framework adopted by the NPS in 1994. Sites important to specific minority groups can be found under each of the eight major themes. Future thematic studies can focus on individual ethnic or other minority groups, but they also can address the stories and experience that may be important to multiple groups and highlight the stories that link us as Americans. For example, sites that represent immigration and migration, labor, the arts, and other stories can be of special importance to multiple minority groups and to all Americans. The National Historic Landmarks Committee has already emphasized the need to reflect current scholarship highlighting the connections between different groups.

We believe that grassroots-driven initiatives must be given a much greater role, especially in cultural and historical

interpretation. If the gaps in history and culture are going to be filled in, such as Latino history, then the people whose history is being interpreted need to have a greater part in determining their nationally significant stories. This will require improved communication between the NPS and grassroots organizations as well as engagement of scholars.

Representation of a theme does not necessarily require the designation of a new site. The NPS should further pursue opportunities to enhance and diversify the stories told at existing NPS units, national heritage areas, national historic landmarks, and other sites. Models for this include not only the initiative of the Civil War battlefield superintendents (“Taking the High Ground”), but also NPS participation in the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience by the Northeast Region of the NPS. New technologies should be applied to help visitors recognize multiple stories and connections.

The NPS should continue to conduct historic context studies and theme studies

that will provide the basis for evaluation of additional national historic landmarks, national heritage areas, and other NPS program designations to tell the whole American story and increase representation of themes not now well covered including: migration, immigration, industry and manufacturing, labor, arts, science, and technology, as well as other sites important to Latinos, Asian Americans, African Americans, and other minorities. A context study of sites related to leaders, trends, and critical events in the history of conservation would be especially relevant to 2016. Special attention should be given to the need for NPS to be proactive in supporting and prioritizing theme studies.

The NPS should review and recommend updates if needed to current guidelines for applying criteria for significance, suitability, feasibility, and partnership management alternatives. These updates should reflect contemporary ideas about representation, redundancy, resilience, and restoration for natural areas. For cultural resources, the committee discussed the challenges of the 50-year “rule,” especially in recognizing important sites at risk of being lost due to the rapid pace of technological change. We recognize that the 50-year standard is flexible, and encourage the NPS to enhance public understanding about this flexibility.

Concerns about current standards for integrity have been brought to our attention as a potential obstacle to designations of historic sites important to minority groups. We recommend that National Register and National Historic Landmark (NHL) program managers continue to review, update as necessary, and enhance understanding about the guidance for evaluating integrity taking into account the type of property, and its rarity or representativeness. This does not mean that standards should be abandoned, but they can be applied with a broad perspective on understanding the meaning of a place and the circumstances of its uses by a given community.

The NPS should place renewed emphasis on recognizing that history changes over time and that layers of changes may deserve consideration in establishing a period of significance that is thoughtful,

and informed by good scholarship. A continuum of use may indeed be historically significant, compared to one moment in time or the date of initial construction. The NHL program has been working to address this issue, and we encourage their efforts to continue.

We also suggest that the NPS should continue to use and develop the tools and methods for identifying, evaluating, and protecting cultural landscapes and ethnographic resources. Those resource types provide opportunities and sophisticated models for evaluating change over time (and thus integrity questions) as well as the relationships of tangible and intangible resource values and stories.

The NPS should pursue interpretive and educational media partnerships, especially to deploy new technologies as potential ways to address the challenge of addressing “historical meaning and social value.” This can enhance linkages among all NPS sites, as well as linkages between NPS sites and museums or other institutions. The National Register tour itineraries offer excellent opportunities to make these connections. In addition to linking thematic stories, new technologies can communicate ideas that may not be based on a specific site or structure. A recent study by the Organization of American Historians on the state of history in the NPS recommended that an advisory group be established to address a variety of programmatic issues. We suggest that such a group could be created under the auspices of the National Historic Landmark Committee to assist the committee as it pursues its goal to expand on the ideas and issues related to system planning.

Additional observations by committee members Laura Feller, Dwight Pitcaithley, Ray Rast, and Quintard Taylor about the representation of cultural resource topics and issues related to the current criteria for national significance appear as Appendix C. Also attached in Appendix C are listings of NHLs and NPS units by significance topics based on available data, along with notes on the constraints of readily available data sources (go to [www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm](http://www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm)).





Path of the Pronghorn Migration Corridor. WCS / JEFF BURRELL

*Sustain the integrity of parks, historic sites, and other protected areas by maintaining corridors to enable species movement, promoting compatible uses of surrounding lands, and by planning for risk management and adaptation to respond to a changing environment.*



### 3. Sustain the Integrity of Parks, Historic Sites, and Other Protected Areas

#### 3.1 Large Landscape-Scale Conservation

A Conservation Study Institute review of experience in work at the landscape scale observed that *“The National Park Service has nearly 100 years of experience to tell us that agencies working only within their boundaries cannot preserve large-scale landscapes and ensure the viability of the populations which depend on them. Their boundaries are not big enough, their pockets not deep enough. They cannot control exotic species, influence regional air and water quality, shape local land use trends, preserve adequate habitat for species survival, protect whole ecosystems, or ensure economic viability of neighboring communities. New methods of working with partners and sharing responsibilities will be necessary to meet these goals.”*

Conservation of biodiversity in the long-term requires planning and implementation beyond the scale of any single national park. Connecting networks of protected areas is one of the most recommended approaches in the scientific literature. This requires ensuring adequate core protected areas and permeability of landscapes such as through corridors to ensure that species can move among protected areas to maintain viable populations and to track appropriate climate space and other resources. Failure to plan and implement in a coordinated manner across this scale will very likely lead to further extinctions of species within parks and across regions.

The Department of the Interior (DOI) and other federal agencies have embraced the idea that conservation for the future requires working on a scale larger than individual parks, refuges, forests, or other public and private lands. Interagency collaboration is widely recognized as essential in meeting challenges that transcend established administrative boundaries.

We reviewed several general studies of landscape-scale conservation, and we

developed nine case briefs of the NPS experience in working on a landscape scale including the Appalachian Trail, Blackstone National Heritage Area, California Desert, Everglades, and the Greater Yellowstone area. Case studies on four areas that were most illustrative—Essex National Heritage Area, Crown of the Continent, Chesapeake Bay, and Boston Harbor Islands—are attached as Appendix D. These case studies were prepared primarily by committee members Gretchen Long and Annie Harris, with support from NPS staff (go to [www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm](http://www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm)).

Some of these initiatives began in response to specific threats: mining, timbering, fragmented development, and climate change for the Crown of the Continent and water quality degradation in the Chesapeake Bay. Alternately, Essex and Boston Harbor Islands were initiated in response to opportunities for enhanced public access and interpretation, and heritage tourism rather than specific threats. In the cases of the Chesapeake Bay, Boston Harbor Islands, and Essex, NPS engagement in the large landscape is supported and to some extent defined by legislation. The NPS involvement in the Crown is a more self-directed effort stimulated by non-governmental organization activity and the NPS management of Glacier National Park.

We found many common principles that applied to interagency and inter-jurisdictional partnerships regardless of the size, scope, and scale of the area or project. In all of these cases, some common threads are:

- Early collaboration in the planning process across agency and geographic boundaries helps find areas of mutual agreement and interest.
- The recognition that the NPS cannot accomplish its mission without

substantial support and cooperation from many different partners including local governments, tribes, and private landowners.

- The value of consistent leadership in building and sustaining relationships.
- An ability to overcome legal and administrative constraints.
- A willingness to share responsibilities and authority.
- The importance of active engagement by local “grassroots” organizations.
- Support from the business community and by non-governmental organizations.
- The NPS can provide leadership and play an influential role without necessarily having full control. A moderate voice and the use of science can enhance collaborative efforts.
- Effective communication is needed to describe the economic benefits of conservation and tourism, capitalizing on national and international recognition of parks and surrounding landscapes.

Three challenges common to all large-landscape efforts involving the NPS are:

- 1. the lack of an explicit legal or administrative framework for cooperation across agency lines;**
- 2. the cumbersome processes for the review of partnership agreements;**
- 3. the mobility of park leadership within the system.**

In spite of the emphasis on “collaborating,” NPS managers continue to encounter bureaucratic obstacles to sharing funds and responsibilities. Although each of the principal federal land management agencies has either statutory direction or explicit policies to coordinate their planning and management activities with their neighbors, there is little agreement on what this means or entails and no legal enforcement of these mandates. These coordination requirements

do, however, provide some foundation for convening these groups and engaging them in planning efforts.

We recommend that Congress, or the President by executive order, consider adopting a new federal interagency conservation coordination requirement designed to ensure that federal conservation objectives are achieved. Such a new interagency conservation process would not only mandate that each of the four principal federal land management agencies (USFS, BLM, NPS, USFWS) engage in coordinated planning and decision making designed to advance federal conservation interests, but would also require preparation of a new interagency conservation coordination statement by the action agency. This would require the action agency to notify potentially interested agencies about any proposed plan or decision, solicit written comments from them, and require the action agency to respond directly to those comments, including an explanation why there are no feasible alternatives, and why it has rejected any proposed changes.

A related approach would be to ask Congress to consider adopting a new National Conservation Network Law. The purpose would be to legally recognize the extensive federal conservation land network that already exists, to promote better coordinated planning and management, and to establish explicit linkages between nearby conservation lands.

At a minimum, the Departments of Agriculture and Interior should adopt or revise federal ecosystem management and collaborative conservation policies to include landscape-scale planning requirements, wildlife corridor proposals, interagency coordination requirements, and private landowner collaboration standards and options. Such collaborative policies should recognize that many USDA programs beyond the U.S. Forest Service can support protection of natural resource values.

At least where federal lands are involved in large landscape conservation efforts, the discussion should also involve determining whether new protective designations are required to achieve these. This would entail,

for example, discussion of park expansion opportunities, new wilderness designations, strategic land exchanges, and national monument designations.

When considering new designations, it is important to distinguish between permanent protection and less than permanent protection efforts. For example, the newly designated Path of the Pronghorn Migration Corridor was stitched together with each agency and entity taking action within the scope of its authority, but some of these actions could be administratively reversed in the future.

We endorse current initiatives in the 2011 “A Call to Action” plan that support NPS engagement in large landscape-scale conservation activities, including the national heritage areas as an essential part of its mission and not as an external or optional activity for park and program staff. We support the creation of additional national heritage areas, especially those associated with NPS units. National heritage areas should be recognized as a part of the National Park Service “family” with a consistent place in the NPS budget and information distributed to the public about the National Park System. The NPS also should enhance its ability to cooperate in the creation of state heritage areas.

We suggest that the NPS integrate large landscape-scale capacity and engagement throughout the organization: it should encompass the broad range of NPS programs and capabilities, and not be limited to corridors and land acquisition.

The NPS should revitalize programs in cooperation with the other agencies that provide technical assistance to gateway communities and build partnerships with the private sector beyond park boundaries. The NPS also should invest in training personnel in collaboration and partnerships and evaluate staff based on their success in these areas.

For success in developing and sustaining partnerships, the NPS needs to undertake a comprehensive review of the current legal and administrative requirements for partnerships, and seek to streamline the process.

Cumbersome procedures for review of partnership agreements, as well as some unrealistic requirements for financial commitments and reporting requirements, are especially burdensome for small organizations and discourage support from potential public and private partners.

The NPS should build “communities of practice” (groups of professionals with shared interests and experience) to improve its capacity for success in developing sustained partnerships.

The NPS has a tradition of encouraging personnel to move from park to park for career advancement opportunities. While mobility has advantages, consistent leadership in a park is often essential for building and sustaining relationships outside the park. The NPS should recognize this value of consistency when considering movement of superintendents and the park leadership team. Recognizing that leadership changes are inevitable highlights the need to build capacity for partnerships throughout the organization and to institutionalize arrangements with park partners. When staff moves take place, a transition strategy should be developed and implemented and should include the non-NPS partners in the orientation and training of the incoming NPS personnel.

---

### ***3.2 NPS Units and Partnership Models***

We were asked to consider how innovative models for parks might be deployed to address challenges and opportunities for the future.

Throughout the world, discussions about the future of conservation are focused less on “setting aside” lands for pure nature reserves, and more on crafting strategies that combine active, sustainable human uses with conservation of natural, cultural, and historic features. Rather than separating people from nature, these discussions seek to recognize the dynamic interactions between people and the environment, suggesting that private ownership and land



uses might be part of the resource to be protected. This is especially true in urban areas where revitalization of neighborhoods and industrial infrastructure may be the goal rather than creating “museums.” Looking to the future, the NPS should be encouraged to find models that fit the circumstances of the resource to be protected and made available for public use.

Status as a “unit” of the National Park System is generally regarded as a high honor and assurance of permanent protection for public benefit. Status as an NPS unit also is expected to provide access to funding in the NPS budget each year. Designations that do not fall under the definition of NPS units are perceived to be lacking a permanent commitment and are subject to inconsistent (or no) federal funding.

At one end of the spectrum are parks where the NPS owns and operates the entire area within legislatively defined boundaries. At the other end are assistance programs, and “parks” where the NPS owns and operates little, if any, of the land. The NPS listing of acreages indicates that in 14.5 percent of the units, the NPS owns less than 50 percent of the land. That listing also includes 15 “units” where the NPS does not own any land as of 2012, but several of those areas anticipate acquisitions as funds are made available or transfers are completed.

We observed that titles and designations are not always consistent in communicating the NPS role and management system. More important than ownership, title, or designation are standards governing resource management and visitor services. Some of the models for “partnership” management have been applied where continued private ownership and use are considered to be part of the cultural landscape to be protected. We found that no model is inherently better than another without considering the context of intended accomplishments based on the type of resource to be protected and managed, as well as the capacity of potential partners.

In selecting a model for a specific site or area, starting the discussion with what functions need to be performed and who

will be responsible may be more productive than starting with a focus on a specific designation or title. At one end of the spectrum, the NPS assists others who have lead responsibilities for resource protection and managing an area. At the other end, the NPS is primarily responsible for managing the resources and providing visitor services. The key to crafting a successful model is to clearly define roles, responsibilities, standards, and expectations.

We also were invited to consider issues and opportunities related to the creation of new park system units where the NPS has little or no authority to acquire and manage land. We specifically considered the examples of Boston Harbor Islands, New Bedford Whaling, Rosie the Riveter, and Mississippi River NRA where land ownership is absent or limited, and found that the critical questions are: (1) do the resources meet criteria for inclusion in the National Park System, especially are they outstanding examples of a resource type, and (2) to what extent does the NPS have authority and capacity to ensure that resource management and visitor services are consistent with NPS policies. While new varieties of park system units may take more time to reach their full impact, we observed that these partnerships with other regional and local entities immediately engage the support of a broader range of stakeholders and, over the long-term, often develop a very robust and resilient park with strong community support.

The importance of NPS policies and standards is evident in the example of City of Rocks National Reserve in Idaho. The legislation authorizes the transfer of management responsibilities to state or local governments upon the Secretary of the Interior’s determination that ordinances and regulations are in place to protect the resources as described in a comprehensive plan. The Secretary also may withdraw this transfer or delegation upon a finding that management is not consistent with preservation purposes. On the other hand, a legislative proposal to create a new NPS unit at the Waco Mammoth site in Texas would prohibit the NPS from spending any funds and would therefore offer no assurance that the resources

would be protected in perpetuity to meet NPS standards, or that the NPS would even be able to actively participate in site management.

We recommend that the NPS support proposals to create new NPS units only where the National Park Service would have the authority and capacity to assure consistency with NPS policies. This should not preclude areas where a mix of ownerships and management are consistent with the intended resource conditions and visitor experiences. Status as an NPS unit should only be supported for areas that meet established standards, and should not be offered just as an emblem to attract visitors or a means to gain access to NPS funding. National Park Service presence just to operate visitor centers also is not usually appropriate without some assurance that significant natural and cultural resources will be managed consistent with NPS policies.

In addition to an evaluation of partnerships in a large landscape scale, the NPS should encourage an independent review of experience with partnerships for management and operation responsibilities of specific units, synthesizing previous evaluations to identify the common elements contributing to success or challenges and to outline policy or legislative changes that would promote effectiveness

The NPS should review and update its guidance for the designation of “affiliated areas” to provide better recognition for sites that are not directly managed by the NPS but meet standards for designation as a unit and can be effectively managed by others.

Additional reference material on management models compiled primarily by committee member Annie Harris appears as Appendix E (go to [www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm](http://www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm)).

### ***3.3 Boundaries***

We were asked to consider questions about the delineation of park unit boundaries to encompass more, often much more, land than the NPS ever intends to own, manage, and operate. Some interested parties have advocated delineating the minimum area necessary to encompass the significant resources within a new unit boundary. On the other hand, some advocates for new parks envision a more expansive boundary surrounding a core or a linear feature.

Ideally park boundaries would encompass all of the natural features and processes, cultural context, or areas needed for management efficiency important to the area’s purpose. Since this is not usually feasible, compromises are inevitable. The purpose of a park boundary should be to define the limits of certain roles and responsibilities for the NPS, while recognizing the need for cooperation on both sides of the line. Being within a boundary delineated by Congress provides encouragement for other federal agencies, as well as state and local partners and private landowners, to make better land use decisions consistent with park purposes. Encouragement for support of park values does not necessarily ensure consistency with NPS goals, but park managers report some better success in working with partners inside a legislated boundary than without a boundary. The boundary also may define the limits of NPS site-specific authority to provide financial assistance, acquire land, or provide other services.

The NPS should produce a summary of issues and opportunities related to experience with boundaries encompassing lands not intended for NPS ownership. This information may suggest the need to update the NPS boundary adjustment guidelines that were developed in response to congressional directions in 1991. Park managers also need to be better informed about the broad range of partnership authorities that may apply across established boundaries.





Atchafalaya National Heritage Area. NPS

*Improve connections for urban populations with the recreation, public health, economic, cultural history, civic engagement, and other benefits of parks and NPS technical assistance programs.*



## 4. Improve Connections for Urban Populations

### *Equity and Access in the Urban Context*

The National Park Service presence is most evident in the western states, and usually in areas distant from cities. By 2030 more than 87 percent of the United States population will be living in urban areas.

A general conclusion drawn from our research and highlighted by many of the leading environmental organizations is that the NPS must engage with urban communities to establish positive lifelong connections between Americans and their national parks, trails, waterways, and natural and cultural heritage. In addition, the NPS should take a leadership role to help address barriers between communities and parks and open space. This may involve many federal partners including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), as well as the USFS, BLM, USFWS, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

Together the NPS, its partners, sister agencies, stakeholders, and community members can play a significant role in ensuring that densely populated diverse communities across the country have access to parks and open spaces and become mobilized to support these assets.

The urban context provides an especially important opportunity to consider the wide range of NPS programs and authorities as well as individual “units.” The Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program is most often identified as the leading candidate for NPS engagement in urban areas. Several historic preservation programs such as the National Register and National Historic Landmarks, and the Historic American Buildings Survey, Historic American Engineering Record, and Historic American Landscapes Survey may be equally valuable for creating community

connections. Many national heritage areas have also proved to be especially effective in engaging urban populations.

There is no broadly accepted standard for what type of services should be provided by the National Park Service in metropolitan areas where the need for access to parks and open space is the greatest. A new system plan should outline how “adequacy” in access to nationally important resources, including cultural sites as well as natural areas and recreational opportunities, should be determined.

The NPS has some presence in reasonable proximity to 40 of the 50 largest metropolitan areas. There are 10 major metropolitan areas where no NPS unit is located within 50 miles. This finding suggests one possible approach to prioritizing attention on those areas lacking any easy access to an NPS site. However, consideration also should be given to the limited capacity of most existing NPS sites to meet urban population needs and interests. Proximity also does not necessarily mean that access is available for many urban residents who do not necessarily have a car. Evaluations of accessibility need to consider opportunities for public transportation as well as potential social and economic obstacles that prevent urban residents from having realistic access to NPS units, landmarks, or similar sites.

The NPS should continue and expand current initiatives to create an urban parks community of practice and other institutional capacity to communicate about what works and what needs improvement among staff that operate in the urban context. The complexity and interrelated components of urban issues call for synchronized and leveraged efforts between agencies and departments, and the NPS should work together in collaboration with other federal departments, agencies within the Department of the Interior, state and local governments, and as many public and private partners as possible in order to be successful. We recognize that the City

Parks Alliance has been making substantial contributions to communication within agencies and across agency lines.

The NPS also should have a relatively permanent presence in program offices located in urban areas as a complement or supplement to the potential for creating new units. A program office could be an extension of the current NPS regional offices, not be limited to one specific activity or project, and provide a gateway to the entire range of NPS capabilities to meet community needs. The NPS also could collaborate with other agencies and organizations to establish urban service centers that build on existing institutions and leverage existing programs.

The NPS should review its inventory of completed special resource studies and focus attention on following up within available authorities or propose new designations for those that could leverage community support and cooperation with other agencies, especially in urban areas.

The National Park System Advisory Board is encouraged to establish a committee on urban engagement to recommend additional steps for developing and improving NPS recognition and presence in our metropolitan areas.

A detailed report by committee members Belinda Faustinos, Ed Reyes, and Jennifer Wolch on opportunities for improving access and equity for urban populations appears as Appendix F (go to [www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm](http://www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm)).











Fort Monroe National Monument. NPS / DIANA BOWEN

*Preparing for unknown challenges is especially important for the NPS because it will develop an overall capacity for flexibility and responsiveness.*

## 5. Build Institutional Capacity in the NPS for Systems Planning and Partnerships

Transformational change on the scale we have proposed requires a significant investment in human capital. The NPS needs to develop the institutional capacity to perform in a highly complex environment, including managing networks of partners and stakeholders, and adapting to new and evolving environmental challenges. This will require that the NPS pay careful attention to its workforce, including recruiting, mentoring, retention, skill enhancement, and career development. The NPS will also have to devote resources to training and education for managers, supervisors, and staff at all levels. Workplace training and education are complementary. Training focuses on specific task requirements, whereas education prepares employees to anticipate and deal with future or unknown challenges. Preparing for unknown challenges is especially important for the NPS because it will develop an overall capacity for flexibility and responsiveness.

The NPS already enjoys high levels of dedication and mission-focus among its current workforce. It will need to invest additional resources to promote greater agility and crosscutting skills in the workforce. Government agencies that have successfully achieved transformational change include the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), and the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). In all three cases, the organizations shifted financial resources into training, and were able to produce substantial returns through this investment. For example, DLA quadrupled its training budget to introduce managerial, supervisory, technical, leadership, and general transformation training. This led to much higher customer and employee satisfaction. At the same time that costs were cut in half, attrition dropped from 17 percent to 2 percent, and efficiencies (such as the time to hire new personnel) were improved by 50 percent. Similar results were obtained at IRS and GAO. The

challenge for the NPS will be to set aside and retain funding for investing in human capital during a period of budget austerity in Washington, DC.

The NPS currently has a park planning office and a strategic planning function, but neither of these offices is designed to undertake planning for the system as described in this report. The park planning program with a staff of four in the Washington, DC, office is focused on development of plans for individual parks and congressionally directed studies of potential new designations. The strategic planning function now works as part of the NPS budget office on performance management as required by the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA). There is currently no staff capacity focused on looking at the “big picture” long-range direction for the NPS as a whole.

We recommend that the NPS dedicate a cadre of staff to the system planning function. These would include representatives of various program areas including natural and cultural resources as well as the conservation and historic preservation assistance programs. Many of these programs are currently represented in the Planning Leadership Group, which could be strengthened to provide more active engagement and dedicated staff support. Such a planning function would develop an initial plan, not as a one-time project, but as a continuing process to engage in the entire range of ongoing planning efforts.

One goal for a planning function that is really strategic and considers the entire system is to encourage each park unit and program to communicate that it is linked to the rest of the NPS and that its effectiveness will be leveraged if there is coordination. This will require a substantial shift in the way park and program managers think about their mission and how interpretive programming is targeted.





National Park Service leadership needs to continue to encourage innovation by building an administrative environment that supports and rewards creativity.

The current legal framework for competitive grants and cooperative agreements should be critically examined, and legislative remedies should be considered as necessary to allow NPS some of the same flexibility available to other agencies. The NPS also should encourage the advancement of staff that has the capacity to develop and sustain partnerships, and invest in the training and evaluation of personnel to improve their collaborative and cooperative management skills.

The NPS also should cooperate with non-profit organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, the National Parks Conservation Association, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, along with other federal agencies and the landscape conservation cooperatives in identifying priorities for protection.

A substantial amount of local interest in the creation of new units managed by the NPS is based on the anticipation of increases in visitation and economic benefits of heritage tourism. Creation of a new NPS unit or changing the designation of an existing unit from a monument to a national park

may generate some initial press coverage and increased visitation, but this is not necessarily sustainable over time. The NPS should have a broader range of tools to assist local sites and governments in efforts to attract and sustain heritage- and ecological-based tourism. Building on the experience with National Register travel itineraries, the NPS should cooperate with the National Trust for Historic Preservation and other organizations to help communities “market” their heritage resources without necessarily creating long-term management responsibilities. This could include improved cooperation with state tourism initiatives to link natural areas, programs to recognize historic sites where tangible resources may be limited, and new technologies for interpretation.

Creation of a new NPS unit or other designation also often comes with high anticipation of federal staffing and investments for facilities or programs. The NPS needs to communicate realistic constraints on its ability to start up management of new areas in light of competing demands for operating existing responsibilities. This may mean that the NPS will need to manage expectations and clearly explain that new responsibilities may not be implemented until some point in the future when adequate funding and staff are available.





Schuylkill River National and State Heritage Area. C. GODDARD

*The NPS should have a broader range of tools to assist local sites and governments in efforts to attract and sustain heritage- and ecological-based tourism.*



North Cascades National Park. NPS

*Only by using its skills to promote and cultivate an ethic of stewardship and civic engagement throughout the nation will the NPS succeed in protecting national parks and in building broad support for conservation.*



## 6. Conclusion: Connections for a System of NPS Units and Programs

In times of fiscal constraint, suggestions abound about concentrating on the NPS “core mission” of operating the parks, and questions are raised about the wisdom of spending funds on programs beyond park operations. The NPS mission is often described as “preservation of the parks unimpaired for the enjoyment of present and future generations.” Cooperation beyond park boundaries and with partners can appear as an additional responsibility when, in fact, it is essential to the agency’s conservation mission and should be recognized as a great opportunity for the NPS to build new support and be more effective.

We envision the 21st-century National Park Service as an agency in which connections are paramount: connections within landscapes, such as national heritage areas; connections across landscapes, such as wildlife corridors; connections among programs and units; and connections with communities and with partners. The NPS should be the convener, catalyst, and collaborator with citizens groups and other government agencies. Only by using its skills to promote and cultivate an ethic of stewardship and civic engagement

throughout the nation will the NPS succeed in protecting national parks and in building broad support for conservation. We recommend that the NPS make every available effort to communicate internally and to the public that its park management and “partnership” responsibilities are both connected and united.

Conservation of our parks for the benefit of present and future generations depends on the cultivation of a stewardship ethic and civic engagement throughout the nation, not just among park visitors and a park’s immediate neighbors. The NPS cannot protect the parks without a strong constituency reflecting all dimensions of the public. The founders of the NPS recognized that inviting people into the parks to enjoy the resources was an essential part of the strategy for protecting those resources. We similarly encourage the NPS to highlight the ability of its many programs to build support for park protection. In doing so, the national park experiences that ensue will help build support for wider conservation initiatives that will strengthen communities, sustain large landscapes, ensure quality of life, and ultimately preserve the values represented in our National Park System.





North Cascades National Park. NPS

*Interpretation of natural areas can illustrate the implications of climate change and the importance of wildlife migration corridors as well as the interaction of human history with the natural environment.*

# Summary of Major Recommendations

## *Create an Integrated System to More Fully Represent the Breadth of America's Heritage.*

1. The NPS should expand efforts to communicate with the public that an integrated system of units and programs provides a wide range of benefits supporting national priorities including job creation, public health, education, civic engagement, and environmental quality.
2. The NPS should build on the experience of the American Latino Heritage initiative and continue to conduct historic context and theme studies that will provide the basis for evaluation of additional national historic landmarks, national heritage areas, NPS units, and other designations to tell the whole American story. Opportunities to increase representation of histories not now well covered include migration and immigration, industry and manufacturing, labor, arts, science and technology, Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans, and other minorities. A theme study of conservation history would be especially timely before the NPS centennial in 2016.
3. The NPS should apply the classification systems and mapping tools available through the USGS and other sources discussed in the natural resources subcommittee report to identify gaps in natural resource representation, focusing especially on opportunities to improve habitat connectivity, to leverage additional protection in large landscape-scale conservation efforts, and to employ restoration strategies. For cultural resources, the NPS framework of 1994 should provide the basis for identifying gaps, with special attention to grassroots inputs.
4. The NPS should update guidelines for applying criteria for significance, suitability, feasibility, and management alternatives considering new park and partnership models. Updates should reflect contemporary ideas about representation, redundancy, resilience, and restoration for natural areas. For cultural resources, efforts should continue to update guidance about integrity, history within the past 50 years, and intangible resources.
5. New technologies should be used to provide linkages among NPS units, connections with other protected areas, and with museums or academic institutions. The NPS should also use contemporary technology including internet and cell phones to inform the public about the complexities of natural and cultural history. New technologies can be effective tools for interpreting complexity. Many sites recognized for a specific event can offer stories of multiple ethnic groups, not just for one reference. Many sites within the NPS can be correlated. Interpretation of natural areas can illustrate the implications of climate change and the importance of wildlife migration corridors as well as the interaction of human history with the natural environment.
6. The NPS should build upon its distinctive role and high public regard as steward of our most iconic natural treasures and cultural sites. The NPS should highlight its potential urban and educational capabilities for engaging the public and encouraging a stewardship ethic.
7. The NPS should develop a broader range of tools to assist the private sector and local governments in partnership efforts to attract and sustain ecological- and heritage-based tourism without necessarily creating additional long-term NPS management responsibilities.



8. The NPS should embrace a flexible approach to management partnerships. However, the NPS should support new unit designations that involve a mix of ownerships only where the NPS has a land base or adequate authority and capacity to assure consistency with NPS management policies.

### *Engage in Large Landscape-Scale Conservation.*

9. The NPS presence is often a cornerstone in large landscapes. The NPS should work with the Secretary of the Interior and Congress to pursue new designations and authorities designed to support large landscape-scale conservation and to better enable parks to address the challenges of a changing environment, including habitat connectivity. Specific outcomes might include a new federal interagency planning and management directive and/or a new National Conservation Network Law that acknowledges the systemic and interconnected character of our various protected areas, the high standards of NPS protection, and promotes interagency planning and management.
10. The NPS should encourage consistency in park leadership to sustain the relationships needed for successful long-term partnerships. Where leadership changes are essential, park managers should seek to institutionalize agreements, processes, and plans with neighbors, and also invite non-profit partners to help with a transition strategy. The NPS should improve training and communication for staff to be successful in developing and sustaining partnerships with communities and to work effectively on a large landscape scale to conserve natural and cultural resources.
11. The NPS should continue to seek authorization for a system of national heritage areas and develop guidelines for encouraging these designations as a collaborative tool for protecting natural and cultural resources. National heritage areas should be recognized as a part of the National Park Service “family” with a consistent place in the NPS budget and in information distributed to the public about the National Park System.

### *Expand Connections with Urban Populations.*

12. The NPS should have a relatively permanent presence in program offices located in urban areas as a complement or supplement to the potential for creating new units. These program offices should enhance efforts to leverage cooperation with other federal agencies, states, and the private sector to meet the park, recreation, and historic site interests of urban communities.
13. The NPS should review the inventory of completed studies that might address opportunities for improved urban engagement and recommend priorities for future studies of potential new units or for other designations and the broad range of NPS assistance programs focusing on urban populations.
14. The NPS should continue work to develop a community of practice to build staff capacity to work effectively in the urban context.
15. The National Park System Advisory Board is encouraged to establish a committee on urban engagement to implement these recommendations and to identify additional steps for developing and improving NPS recognition and presence in our metropolitan areas.



## *Develop Institutional Capacity in the NPS for Systems Planning and Partnerships.*

16. The NPS should develop institutional capacity including a dedicated staff for system planning and proceed immediately to coordinate with work in progress by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as states, other federal agencies, and the private sector. The NPS should pursue system planning that is expansive in scale, adaptive, and dynamic; it should be an ongoing activity that helps integrate NPS units with its program responsibilities. It should provide a framework that encourages input from community groups and national organizations.
17. The NPS should undertake a comprehensive review of the current legal and administrative requirements for partnerships, grants, and cooperative agreements, and seek to streamline those processes with policy or legislative changes as necessary. The NPS should provide training, evaluation incentives, and career development opportunities to enhance staff capacity for supporting effective partnerships.
18. The NPS should be proactive and cooperate with non-profit organizations, other federal agencies, and the landscape conservation cooperatives to identify priorities for protection. The NPS should continuously look for strategic opportunities to support effective conservation on a large landscape scale considering ecological as well as community connections.

*We envision the 21st-century National Park Service as an agency in which connections are paramount: connections within landscapes, such as national heritage areas; connections across landscapes, such as wildlife corridors; connections among programs and units; and connections with communities and with partners.*



Anacostia River, Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network. CHRIS SPIELMANN

*The NPS should pursue system planning that is expansive in scale, adaptive, and dynamic; it should be an ongoing activity that helps integrate NPS units with its program responsibilities.*



# National Park System Advisory Board

## Planning Committee Report References

Alliance of National Heritage Areas, *National Heritage Areas and the National Park Service: Protecting Investment and Sustaining a Public-Private Partnership for the Future*, white paper.

Alliance of National Heritage Areas, *2010 Annual Report*.

Anderson, M.G. and A. Olivero Sheldon, *Conservation Status of Fish, Wildlife, and Natural Habitats in the Northeast Landscape: Implementation of the Northeast Monitoring Framework*, The Nature Conservancy, 2011.

Barrett, Brenda, *National Heritage Areas: Developing a Model for Measuring Success*, 2004 US/ICOMOS International Symposium, Natchitoches, Louisiana.

Barrett, Brenda, "How to Treasure a Landscape: What is the Role of the National Park Service?" *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship*, vol. 7, no. 1, Winter 2010.

Barrett, Brenda, "Roots for the National Heritage Area Family Tree," *The George Wright Forum*, 2003.

Belize Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, *The Belize National Protected Areas System Plan (2005)*.

Brown, Warren Lee, "New National Parks for the Next Century," Proceedings of the 2009 George Wright Society Conference.

Chandler, William J., *The Future of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act in the Twenty-first Century*, May 2006.

Chandler, William and Hannah Gillelan, *The Makings of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act A Legislative History and Analysis*, Marine Conservation Biology Institute, 2005.

Colorado Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation of History Colorado, the Colorado Historical Society, *The Power of Heritage and Place: A 2020 Action Plan to Advance Preservation in Colorado*, 2020 Colorado Statewide Preservation Plan.

Comer, P., et al., *Ecological Systems of the United States: A Working Classification of U.S. Terrestrial Systems*, NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia, 2003.

Conservation Study Institute, *Collaboration and Conservation: Lessons Learned in Areas Managed through National Park Service Partnerships*, 2001.

Conservation Study Institute, *Collaboration and Conservation: Lessons Learned from National Park Service Partnership Areas in the Western United States*, 2003.

Conservation Study Institute, *Leading in a Collaborative Environment: Six Case Studies Involving Collaboration and Civic Engagement by NPS*, 2010.

Davey Adrian G., *World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), National System Planning for Protected Areas*, 1998.

Frenchman, Dennis, and Jonathan S. Lane, *Assessment of Preservation and Development in Lowell National Historical Park at its 30-Year Anniversary, Where have we been and where should we be going?*, discussion white paper.

Harvard Forest, *Wildlands and Woodlands: A Vision for the New England Landscape*, Harvard University, 2010.

Hawai'i State Historic Preservation Division, *State Historic Preservation Plan Best Practices Report*, (SMS Consultants).

Prola, Rosemary, *Best Practices in Heritage Development from the National Heritage Areas*, white paper for National Park Service and National Alliance of Heritage Areas, 2005.

Kohnen Anna, *Gap Analysis of the Theme "Expressing Cultural Values" within the NPS Revised Thematic Framework*, National Parks Conservation Association white paper.

Lausche, Barbara, *Guidelines for Protected Areas Legislation*, IUCN Environmental Policy and Law Paper no. 81.

Lemieux, Christopher J. et al., "Climate change, biodiversity conservation and protected area planning in Canada," *The Canadian Geographer* 49, no. 4 (2005).

Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, *Large Landscape Conservation: A Strategic Framework for Policy and Action*, 2010.

Marris, Emma, "Rambunctious Garden: Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World," *Bloomsbury USA*, 2011.

McNamee Kevin, "Filling in the Gaps: Establishing New National Parks," *The George Wright Forum*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 142–150 (2010).

Maybury, Kathleen P., editor, *Seeing the Forest and the Trees: Ecological Classification for Conservation*, The Nature Conservancy, 1999.

Mitchell, Brent, "International Models of Protected Landscapes," *The George Wright Forum*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2003.

Noss, Reed et al., "Bolder Thinking for Conservation," *Conservation Biology*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2012.

Ostola Larry, "Parks Canada's National Historic Sites: Past, Present, and Future," *The George Wright Forum*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 161–169 (2010).

Parks Australia, *Australia's Strategy for A National Reserve System, 2009-2030*.

Parks Canada, *System Plan*, <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/docs/v-g/nation/index.aspx>.

Parks Victoria, *Linking People and Spaces*, 2002.

Parks Victoria, *Victoria's System of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries Management Strategy, 2003-2010*.

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, *Pennsylvania's Statewide Historic Preservation Plan, 2012–2017*.



Phillips, Adrian, "Turning Ideas on Their Head: The New Paradigm for Protected Areas," *The George Wright Forum*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2003.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, *Master Plan for Queensland's Park System* (Australia), 2001.

Sayre, Roger, et al., *USGS-NPCA Ecosystem Gap Analysis 2012*, National Parks Conservation Association, (unpublished paper).

Seney Joe, "New Horizons for Cooperative Management and Collaborative Partnerships: Redwood National and State Parks, California, 1994–2010," Proceedings of the 2011 George Wright Society Conference on Parks, Protected Areas, and Cultural Sites.

Spence Christie et al., "Managing for Results: Parks Canada's Approach to Planning, Monitoring, and Reporting," Proceedings of the 2011 George Wright Society Conference on Parks, Protected Areas, and Cultural Sites.

Sprinkle, John H. Jr., "An Orderly, Balanced, and, Comprehensive Panorama of American History:" Filling Thematic Gaps within the National Park System," *The George Wright Forum*, vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 269–279 (2010).

The Nature Conservancy, *Planning for Tomorrow's Challenges: Recommendations of the Planning Evolution Team*, 2011.

The Nature Conservancy, *Conservation By Design*, November 2006.

The Trust for Public Land, *2011 City Park Facts*.

Tweed, William C., *Uncertain Path: A Search for the Future of National Parks*, University of California Press, 2011.

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, *Conserving the Future Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation: The National Wildlife Refuge System*, U.S. Department of the Interior, October 2011.

U.S. National Park Service, Park Planning and Special Studies, *Protected Landscapes*, white paper.

U.S. National Park Service, *Report on Criteria for Affiliated Areas*, submitted to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs House of Representatives and the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, U.S. Senate, pursuant to PL 100-336; National Park Service, February 1990.

U.S. National Park Service, *Roles in Urban Areas—Case Studies: San Gabriel Watershed and Mountains Special Resource Study*, February 2006.





Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park. NPS

*The NPS should continue work to develop a community of practice to build staff capacity to work effectively in the urban context.*



# National Park System Advisory Board Planning Committee

## COMMITTEE CHAIR

### **Gretchen Long**

Member, National Park System Advisory Board; Past Chair, Board of Trustees, and Trustee Emeritus, National Parks Conservation Association

## MEMBERS

### **Belinda Faustinos**

Member, National Park System Advisory Board; Executive Officer, San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (retired)

### **Laura Feller, Ph.D.**

Historian, National Park Service (retired)

### **Michael V. Finley**

President, Turner Foundation

### **Denis P. Galvin**

Former Deputy Director, National Park Service

### **Craig Groves, Ph.D.**

Director, Conservation Methods Team, The Nature Conservancy

### **Annie C. Harris**

Executive Director, Essex National Heritage Area

### **Jodi A. Hilty, Ph.D.**

Director, North America Program, Wildlife Conservation Society

### **Professor Robert B. Keiter**

Wallace Stegner Distinguished Professor of Law and Director, Wallace Stegner Center for Land, Resources and the Environment; S.J. Quinney College of Law, University of Utah

### **Honorable Tony Knowles**

Chairman, National Park System Advisory Board

### **Pamela A. Matson, Ph.D.**

Chester Naramore Dean, School of Earth Sciences, Stanford University

### **Dwight T. Pitcaithley, Ph.D.**

Professor, Department of History, New Mexico State University

### **Raymond Rast, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor, Department of History, California State University, Fullerton

### **Honorable Ed P. Reyes**

Council Member, Los Angeles City Council

### **J. Michael Scott, Ph.D.**

Professor, Department of Fish and Wildlife College of Natural Resources, University of Idaho

### **Quintard Taylor, Jr., Ph.D.**

Scott and Dorothy Bullitt Professor of American History, University of Washington

### **Jennifer Wolch, Ph.D.**

Dean, College of Environmental Design, University of California, Berkeley

## STAFF

### **Warren Lee Brown**

Former Chief, Park Planning and Special Studies, National Park Service









