

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

RECORD OF DECISION

**ROCK CREEK PARK AND THE ROCK CREEK AND POTOMAC PARKWAY
FINAL GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN**

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Rock Creek Park and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway

Washington, D.C.

The Department of the Interior, National Park Service (NPS), has prepared this Record of Decision on the *Final Rock Creek Park and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement (July 2005)*. This Record of Decision includes a description of the background of the plan, a statement of the decision made, synopses of alternatives considered, the basis for the decision, findings on impairment of park resources and values, a description of the environmentally preferable alternative, a listing of measures to minimize environmental harm, and summary of public and agency involvement in the decision-making process.

BACKGROUND OF THE PLAN

The Final Rock Creek Park and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway General Management Plan is the first comprehensive plan prepared for Rock Creek Park and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway by the NPS. This plan represents the results of a planning process that began in 1996. It represents the shared vision of the NPS and the public on how the park and parkway will be used and managed in future years.

A General Management Plan (GMP) sets the long-term goals so that a park has a clearly defined direction for resource protection and visitor use, and it should provide a realistic view for the future. By law, at 16 U.S.C.A. Section 1a-7 (b), GMP's are to cover resource preservation, "types and general intensities of development (including visitor circulation and transportation patterns, systems and modes) associated with public enjoyment and use of the area, including general locations, time of implementation, and anticipated costs; ... identification of and implementation commitments for visitor carrying capacities for all areas of the unit;" and any potential boundary adjustment. The NPS expects that GMP's may need to be reviewed every 10-15 years, more frequently if conditions in a park change significantly. (Management Policies 2006, 2.3.1.12)

This plan looks at the central issue of how to meet the often conflicting purposes of protecting the scenic, natural and cultural resources of the park, while concurrently providing for public use of these resources. This issue is complicated by the location of Rock Creek Park within a major metropolitan area, Washington, D.C. As a result of its location, the park has many users, many of whom hold widely varying opinions about its optimal use. The final GMP evaluated a full range of alternatives for the decision points identified in the plan. These decision points are: a) how traffic should be managed in Rock Creek Park and on the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway; b) the most appropriate levels of service and locations for visitor interpretation and education in the park; c) the appropriate balance between rehabilitation of historic structures and cultural landscapes and preservation of natural resources; and d) the most appropriate locations to support park administration and operations functions to minimize resource disturbance.

Several areas and features of Rock Creek Park are covered by other existing plans that have been the subject of an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA), so they are not included within this plan. These include the tennis stadium, the subject of a 1993 EIS which also covered the associated recreation fields at Brightwood, and the Carter Barron Amphitheater; the Fort Circle Parks for which a management plan/EA was done in 2003; and the 2003 EA for the existing cell towers. Moreover, the NPS is presently conducting a parkwide telecommunications plan, a three year study of migratory birds, and a plan to manage the park's deer population.

The 1890 law establishing Rock Creek Park states that the area is to "be perpetually dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasure ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of the United States." It specifies that the park is to "provide for the preservation from injury or spoliation of all timber, animals, or curiosities within said park, and their retention in their natural condition, as nearly as possible." The law also instructs that park roads be established to provide for public recreation, specifically to "lay out and prepare roadways and bridle paths, to be used for driving and for horseback riding, respectively, and footways for pedestrians." This law forms the basis for planning and management of park resources which is further governed by the laws, regulations and policies applicable to the NPS and the National Park System. (Note: During this planning process the NPS revised its Management Policies which apply across the National Park System. As the NPS implements this plan, it will comply with the version of the Management Policies then in effect.)

Creation of Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway was authorized in 1913 to prevent pollution of Rock Creek and to connect "Potomac Park with the Zoological Park and Rock Creek Park." Beach Drive and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, which run alongside Rock Creek Park from the Maryland state line to Virginia Avenue NW, provide a north-south route that has become a popular commuting route. Since May 1937, the National Park Service has managed traffic on weekdays by making the parkway one-way inbound into the city during the morning rush-hour and one-way outbound from the city during the afternoon rush-hour. Other park roads provide east-west routes across the park. Weekday traffic on Beach Drive averages about 6,600 vehicles per day through the scenic gorge area (between Joyce Road and Broadbranch Road), while approximately 55,000 vehicles per day typically use the busiest portion of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway (between Beach Drive and the Virginia Avenue intersection).

Rock Creek Park supports more than 2 million recreational visits and more than 9 million non-recreational visits annually. Non-recreational visits primarily involve the use of park roads to travel between destinations outside the park. Since 1966, the NPS has closed portions of Beach Drive and other park roads to motorized vehicles on weekends and holidays. These closures provide recreation

opportunities that are unmatched elsewhere in the District of Columbia and are popular with park visitors.

The general management plan includes purpose statements for the park and parkway that were developed based on these units' legislative mandates and on NPS policies. The purpose statements are the criteria against which the appropriateness of all recommendations, operational decisions, and actions for the park and parkway are tested.

DECISION - SELECTED ACTION

The National Park Service will implement the preferred alternative from the Final GMP, Alternative A: Improved Management of Established Park Uses as described in the *GMP*. This alternative constitutes the National Park Service's selected action for the park and parkway. The NPS has selected Alternative A based on its ability to best respond to the recreational, environmental, and traffic considerations for the short- and long-term future of the park and without impairing park resources.

Under Alternative A the existing park roadway system would be retained and non-recreational through-traffic would be accommodated. It would continue weekday auto travel throughout the park, but would implement traffic-calming and speed enforcement measures to reduce traffic speeds and volumes to improve visitor safety and better control traffic volumes and speeds through the park. Speed tables and additional traffic signs would be installed on Beach Drive in the gorge area. Alternative A also would enhance interpretation and education opportunities and improve the use of park resources, especially cultural resources. It generally would retain the current scope of visitor uses. Alternative A would:

- Upgrade trails and rehabilitate deteriorating segments.
- Rehabilitate the Peirce Mill complex to focus on the history of milling and land use in the area. This would expand on the already completed rehabilitation of the Peirce Mill Barn.
- Move the park administrative offices out of the Peirce-Klingbe Mansion at Linnaean Hill. The preferred approach would be to locate these offices in commercial space outside the park. If this proved not to be feasible, a new office facility would be constructed at an already disturbed area within the park, such as at the maintenance yard.
- Rehabilitate the Linnaean Hill complex for adaptive use compatible with park values.
- Move the U.S. Park Police substation out of the Lodge House on Beach Drive at Joyce Road. The preferred approach would be to use commercial space outside the park. If this proved not to be feasible, a new park police substation would be constructed within an already disturbed area in the park, such as near the existing U.S. Park Police H-3 stables.
- Convert the Lodge House to a visitor contact station for park orientation, information, and interpretation.
- Rehabilitate and expand the nature center and upgrade the planetarium to improve effectiveness of public programs.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Three other management alternatives were analyzed including a no action (baseline) alternative which would continue the implementation of existing plans and policies. Each action alternative is environmentally acceptable and each has advantages. Early in the alternative development stage there were five alternative scenarios presented to the public for their comments. These were redefined into the alternatives presented in the draft and final plans.

Alternative B: Continue Current Management / No Action

Alternative B would continue the current management pattern into the future. It represents the “no action alternative” required by implementation guidelines for the National Environmental Policy Act. The NPS would continue weekend and holiday closures of sections of Beach Drive and would accommodate automobile travel along the length of Beach Drive on weekdays using current management techniques. Current Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway traffic management policies and practices would be continued. There would not be any major changes in resources management, visitor programs, or facilities beyond regular maintenance. The current park road system would be retained and existing traffic management would continue.

Alternative C: Nonmotorized Recreation Emphasis

Alternative C would eliminate traffic in much of the park north of Broad Branch Road by closing three sections of Beach Drive to automobiles and converting them to paved trails. These would be the same three segments that currently are closed on weekends and holidays. It also would implement traffic-reducing and traffic-calming measures on roads in the southern portion of the park and on the parkway to encourage slower vehicle speeds and reduce the number of non-recreational vehicles. On the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, Alternative C would end lane reversals which are used to facilitate rush-hour commuter traffic and allow two-way traffic at all times. This alternative would implement high-occupancy vehicle restrictions during rush-hours in the primary travel direction of the traffic. Alternative C management proposals for resources other than traffic would be the same as those for Alternative A.

The intent of closing the road along portions of the Rock Creek valley floor would be to manage this area as a quiet refuge from urban automobile traffic and to promote nonmotorized recreation throughout the week. This area would become a destination for nonmotorized activities in keeping with the park’s natural and historic character. The road converted into a paved trail would become the bicycle route through the Rock Creek valley and connecting to the Potomac River as envisioned in regional bicycle plans.

Alternative D: Mid-Weekday Recreation Enhancement

Alternative D would close three segments of Beach Drive north of Broad Branch Road to motorized vehicles on weekdays for a 6-hour period, from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. These would be the same segments that currently are closed on weekends and holidays. For the other 18 hours of each weekday, including both rush-hour periods, traffic management would be similar to Alternative B, although traffic-calming measures like those in Alternative A would be used to reduce traffic speeds and volumes. Alternative D would manage resources other than traffic in the same manner as Alternative A. It was the NPS’ preferred alternative in the Draft GMP.

This alternative would not change cross-park traffic patterns, but would provide a nonmotorized setting for recreation through much of the northern portion of the park during the middle part of workdays. It would also maintain driving along the length of Beach Drive as an allowed activity during rush-hours and such popular times as summer evenings. No change would occur on the current management of the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway.

Alternative D was developed to implement weekday vehicular traffic restrictions on sections of upper Beach Drive in non-rush hour periods and to reduce automobile traffic in the most sensitive portions of Rock Creek Park, while minimizing any impact on surrounding neighborhoods and commuters. It was intended as a balance between traffic and nonmotorized recreation. During rush-hour periods, the alternative would attempt to facilitate traffic flows and minimize the diversion of rush-hour traffic from the park into nearby neighborhoods. Between rush-hour periods on weekdays, it would promote nonmotorized recreation and provide a quiet refuge from the surrounding urban area.

BASIS FOR THE DECISION

The NPS used its standard process called Choosing by Advantages (CBA), to formulate the preferred alternative for the final general management plan after reviewing the comments received on the draft plan. CBA helps determine the best features among all of the alternatives evaluated in the draft plan. These best features, or advantages, are then weighed and summarized to help identify the preferred alternative.

As reflected by the analysis contained in the environmental impact statement, Alternative A would not result in the impairment of park resources and would allow the NPS to conserve park resources and provide for their enjoyment by visitors. The NPS considered the information and analysis contained in the draft and final GMP/EIS and comments from the public, Federal, state and local agencies and elected officials, taking into account applicable law, regulation and NPS policy.

The most difficult decision to be made in the general management planning process was the management of traffic on the park road system because these park roads are recognized historic resources and are also the primary means for most visitors to experience the park. They are also heavily used as commuter routes.

Unlike other aspects of the GMP, it was proposals for changes in traffic which drew the most attention from members of the public and government officials alike. These comments ranged from closing Beach Drive to automobile traffic allowing bicycles only, to ending the current weekend closures to allow automobile traffic at all times. In 2001, the councils of the District of Columbia and Montgomery County passed formal resolutions emphasizing the importance of Beach Drive and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway to the local transportation system. The councils urged that these corridors remain open with no new restrictions to motor vehicles because of their concerns for potential adverse effects on the heavily burdened regional street grid. This position was also taken by the Maryland Department of Transportation, the District of Columbia Department of Transportation, several neighborhood organizations, and many individuals who commented during scoping.

Alternative A, as modified during the process, responds positively to these concerns. While this alternative would include traffic-calming measures and improved enforcement of speed limits, it would keep park roads and the parkway open during non-rush hours. Changes to Alternative A between the draft and final versions of the general management plan included:

- Eliminating high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) requirements during rush hours on Beach Drive;
- Providing an increased emphasis on flexibility and the use of an adaptive management approach, including implementing actions on a trial basis, to identify and apply the most effective techniques for reducing traffic volumes and speeds on Beach Drive; and
- Implementing traffic calming measures on Beach Drive to encourage some of the automobile traffic on Beach Drive to shift to Ross Drive.

FINDINGS ON IMPAIRMENT OF PARK RESOURCES AND VALUES

After analyzing the environmental impacts described in the GMP/EIS and public comment received, the Regional Director has determined that implementation of the preferred alternative will not constitute an impairment to the Rock Creek Park and Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway resources and values at this time. The actions comprising the selected alternative are intended to protect the park's natural and cultural resources.

The NPS may not allow the impairment of park resources and values unless directly and specifically provided for by legislation or proclamation establishing the park. Impairment that is prohibited by the NPS Organic Act and the General Authorities Act is an impact that, in the professional judgment of the responsible NPS manager, would harm the integrity of park resources or values, including the opportunities that otherwise would be present for the enjoyment of those resources or values. In determining whether impairment would occur, park managers examine the duration, severity, and magnitude of the impact; the resources and values affected; and direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the action.

An impairment determination is made as part of the NPS decision on a GMP. Once that determination is made and that GMP is issued, park managers are charged with monitoring all park uses to prevent unacceptable impacts and avoid impairment. According to NPS policy, "When an NPS decision-maker becomes aware that an ongoing activity might have led or might be leading to an impairment of park resources or values, he or she must investigate and determine if there is or will be an impairment. This investigation and determination may be made independent of, or as part of, a park planning process undertaken for other purposes." (Management Policies 2006, 1.4.7) Changes in conditions can lead to amending a GMP or producing a new one, or other plan, with an accompanying impairment evaluation.

This policy against impairment does not prohibit all impacts to park resources and values. The NPS has the discretion to allow impacts to park resources and values when necessary and appropriate to fulfill the purposes of the park, so long as the impacts do not constitute impairment. Moreover, an impact is less likely to constitute impairment if it is an unavoidable result, which cannot be further mitigated, of an action necessary to conserve or restore the integrity of park resources or values.

According to NPS policy, "an impact would be more likely to constitute an impairment to the extent that it affects a resource or value whose conservation is: a) necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of the park; b) key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park; or c) identified in the park's general management plan or other relevant NPS planning documents as being of significance." (Management Policies 2006, 1.4.5)

Impact topics analyzed for the preferred alternative were: air quality, Rock Creek and its tributaries, wetlands and floodplains, deciduous forests, protected and rare species, native wildlife, archeological resources, historic structures and cultural landscapes, traditional park character and visitor experience, public health and safety, regional and local transportation, and community character.

The preferred alternative (Alternative A), would result in negligible effects on air quality compared to the no action alternative (Alternative B). It would not result in the exceedence of the 1-hour National Ambient Air Quality Standard for carbon monoxide. It would not cause any impairment of resources or values associated with air quality.

Compared to future conditions occurring under the alternative of no action/continue current management, the preferred alternative would produce short-term, negligible to measurable, adverse effects on water quality. These primarily would be caused by increased sedimentation associated with trail construction near streams and expansion of the nature center and potential development of park headquarters and U.S. Park Police sub-station if commercial space is not available. Short-term, adverse effects from other construction would be negligible. Long-term effects on Rock Creek and its tributaries would be measurable and beneficial. Contributing factors would include increased implementation of best management practices, reduced sedimentation by replacing poorly designed trail segments that have erosion problems, and improved park-wide management soils, vegetation, and water under an updated natural resources management plan.

Cumulatively, continued interagency measures, such as reducing point and non-point discharges, and maintaining and improving sanitary and combined sewer systems would continue to produce beneficial, long-term, major effects on water quality. Coordination would also produce beneficial long-term, major reductions in streambed alterations such as scour and sedimentation.

The management actions of the preferred alternative would not result in impairment of resources or values associated with Rock Creek and its tributaries.

The preferred alternative would not produce any adverse, long-term effects on wetlands or floodplains. Short-term reductions in floodplain capacities could occur during construction activities at the Peirce Mill complex and along trails. There would be no impairment of resources or values associated with wetlands and floodplains.

Compared to the no action alternative, trail construction activities would result in a short-term, minor, adverse effect on up to 5.8 acres of the park's upland deciduous forest resource. Following revegetation, long-term effects in these areas would be negligible. Major, long-term, beneficial effects may occur in both upland and riparian deciduous forest areas through rehabilitation and/or restoration of problem areas of trails. There would be no impairment of resources or values associated with deciduous forests.

Compared to the no action alternative, long-term protection of the endangered Hays Spring amphipod could be enhanced by implementing more active protection of springs and their up-gradient drainages. Opportunities for the public to learn about protected and rare species would be improved. There would be no impairment of resources or values associated with protected and rare species.

The preferred alternative would not produce substantial changes in the overall abundance, diversity, or habitat availability for native wildlife. However, long-term, beneficial effects could result within the park to box turtles (moderate) and gray foxes (major) from reductions in road kill associated with traffic management provisions and from better education of visitors on the importance of not disturbing or

removing box turtles. The preferred alternative would not result in any impairment of resources or values associated with native wildlife.

Cumulative impacts from actions outside the park would have much larger effects than those actions associated with the preferred alternative. Woodrow Wilson Bridge mitigation, which has restored upper watershed access for at least three species of migratory fish in Rock Creek, will produce a major, long-term, beneficial effect within the park and the entire creek system. Adverse effects on terrestrial and semi-aquatic native wildlife would occur from the loss of habitat associated with development in the watershed. Development-related effects on native aquatic life within the park could be either adverse or beneficial, based on changes in pollutant loadings and basin hydrology from development occurring upstream from the park.

Because it includes ground-disturbing activities, the preferred alternative would have a higher potential for construction-related significant adverse effects on archeological resources than the no action alternative. However, the survey, identification, and avoidance measures that would be implemented prior to construction would avoid most or all of the significant adverse effects. There would be no impairment of resources or values associated with archeological resources.

Under the preferred alternative, the historic structures and cultural landscapes in Rock Creek Park would be afforded enhanced protection and preservation treatment. Rehabilitation of historic structures and cultural landscapes would occur. Several significant historic structures would be rehabilitated and adaptively reused in accordance with park resource values and some park functions would be relocated from them to other facilities. There would be no impairment of resources or values associated with historic structures and cultural landscapes.

The preferred alternative would maintain the traditional character and visitor experiences of Rock Creek Park and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. Moderate, beneficial, long-term effects would be associated with upgraded trails throughout the park; improvements to visitor contact, interpretation, and education facilities and services; and improved access for visitors with impaired mobility. Improved working conditions for park administrative staff and personnel in the U.S. Park Police District 3 substation would result in a moderate beneficial effect on park operations, but the intensity of the beneficial impact perceived by the public probably would be minor. Compared to the no action alternative, this alternative would have a moderate, beneficial effect on the park's recreational opportunities.

By reducing the number and severity of traffic accidents in Rock Creek Park and along the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway, the traffic calming measures of the preferred alternative would have a long-term, major, beneficial effect on public health and safety. This alternative would have negligible effects on crimes against persons or the effectiveness of emergency evacuations.

During rush hour periods, effects of the preferred alternative on regional and local transportation would be negligible compared to the no action alternative.

During non-rush hour periods, the preferred alternative would reduce traffic speeds and volumes along Beach Drive while allowing weekday vehicle access to all existing road segments and preserving the existing visitor experience of automobile travel through the park. The decreased weekday non-rush-hour traffic speeds and volumes on Beach Drive would reduce conflicts between automobile use and non-motorized travel in the Rock Creek valley.

Because Beach Drive would remain open to mid-day traffic, changes in traffic in neighborhoods around the park would not be expected. Any shift in automobile traffic from park roads to other routes outside the park would have very little effect on city traffic conditions. Throughout the day, the improvements to recreation trails would enhance non-motorized transportation in the park. During non-rush hour periods, reduced automobile traffic speeds and volumes may increase non-motorized travel on Beach Drive, particularly bicycle travel.

The preferred alternative would have negligible effects on the quality of life of area residents compared to the no action alternative. Traffic is expected to become more congested, but park actions would not introduce additional traffic onto the roadways surrounding the park. Opportunities for recreation and education outside the park would continue to be available. The preferred alternative would have negligible economic effects on the neighborhoods around the park and would not be detectable in the city's economy.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

The environmentally preferable alternative is the one that would cause the least damage to the biological and physical environment, and would best protect, preserve, and enhance historical, cultural, and natural resources. It is determined by applying the criteria in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, guided by the Council on Environmental Quality direction that the environmentally preferable alternative is the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in the National Environmental Policy Act Section 101. The environmentally preferable alternative is not necessarily the alternative selected for implementation.

Section 101(b) of the National Environmental Policy Act identifies six criteria to help determine the environmentally preferable alternative. The act directs that federal plans should:

- Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations.
- Assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings.
- Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences.
- Preserve important historical, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, wherever possible, an environment which supports diversity and variety of individual choice.
- Achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities.
- Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

Based on these criteria, Alternative D would be environmentally preferable compared to the other action alternatives including the preferred alternative, which has been selected for action. Road closures during the middle of weekdays would reduce wildlife roadway mortality, would improve the ability for park visitors to participate in nonmotorized recreation and interpretation activities along Beach

Drive during workday mid-day periods, and would reduce traffic-induced noise along Beach Drive. Alternative B, the no action alternative, which would continue current management, would not satisfy the criteria as completely as the other alternatives.

MEASURES TO MINIMIZE ENVIRONMENTAL HARM

The NPS investigated practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts that could result from implementation of the selected action. The measures have been incorporated into Alternative A, and are integrated throughout the GMP. Some of these measures include:

Natural Resources

- Continue to manage the park's natural resources to preserve fundamental physical and biological processes, as well as individual species, features, and plant and animal communities.
- Natural systems, and the human influences upon them, will be monitored to detect change. The possible causes and effects of changes that might cause impacts on park resources and values will be evaluated. The results of monitoring and research to understand the detected change will be used to develop appropriate management actions.

Water Resources

- Coordinate with responsible agencies to obtain the highest possible standards available under the Clean Water Act for the protection of park waters.
- Support the investigation and mitigation of artificially accelerated streambank erosion and stream bed incision.
- Continue to apply best management practices to all pollution-generating activities and facilities as well as any disturbance to native soil causing erosion in the park.

Native Species

- Continue to maintain native plant and animal species and, when necessary, influence natural fluctuations in populations of these species.
- Inventory all plants and animals in the park (ongoing).
- Implement measures to protect the federally endangered Hays spring amphipod and the rare Kenk's amphipod and their habitats. Such measures will include a management plan and assessment of recharge areas for amphipod sites and a monitoring strategy.

Cultural Resources

- Survey and inventory archeological resources and document their significance (ongoing).
- Implement and maintain appropriate level of preservation of archeological sites.
- Determine appropriate treatment for each historic structure and cultural landscape (ongoing).

Land Protection

- Monitor and remove boundary encroachments.

Visitor Experience and Park Use Requirements

- Continue to provide opportunities for forms of enjoyment that are uniquely suited and appropriate to the natural and cultural resources found in the park.
- Encourage visitor activities that are appropriate to the purpose for which the park was established; will foster an understanding of and appreciation for park resources and values; and can be sustained without causing unacceptable impacts to park resources or values.
- Monitor traffic on park roads to detect changes that may cause future impacts to the park's natural and cultural resources.

The mitigation efforts will be monitored and enforced. This will assure compliance monitoring; biological and cultural resource protection; traffic management; noise abatement; noxious weed control; pollution prevention measures; visitor safety and education; revegetation; architectural character; and other mitigation measures. For actions from this plan which are taken in the future, the NPS will comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and other relevant legislation. Moreover, these future actions as well as ongoing actions are subject to modification to reduce or eliminate potential impacts, particularly if these impacts could result in impairment.

PUBLIC AND INTERAGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement in general management planning is an integral and critical part of the NPS commitment to engage the public in a continuous, dynamic conversation that strengthens public understanding of the full meaning and contemporary relevance of the resources in each park unit. Public involvement throughout the planning process provides focused opportunities for park managers and the planning team to interact with the public and to learn about public concerns, expectations, and values.

Since 1996, the GMP planning process began, there have been numerous opportunities for the public to be informed participate. There have been many public meetings and hearings; several newsletters have been produced; and articles in local newspapers regarding the GMP have been written. Thousands of comments have been received, many of which have been incorporated into the preferred alternative.

Newsletter 1 (June 1996) was published and distributed to the park's mailing list. The newsletter contained information on the function of a general management plan, draft statements of the park purpose and significance, information on the planning team and the process for planning, and methods available to the public for communicating with the team and participating in the planning effort. A notice of intent to prepare a general management plan and environmental impact statement was published on July 18, 1996, in the *Federal Register* (volume 61, number 139, page 37494).

A public scoping meeting was held July 24, 1996, in the auditorium at the National Zoo. About 100 people attended and 35 spoke.

Based on discussions at the scoping meeting, the planning team hosted two focus group meetings at the Rock Creek Nature Center and Planetarium. One was on September 17, 1996, with representatives of three area bicycling organizations. The second was on September 18 with representatives of seven environmental organizations. In October 1996, members of the planning team attended a presentation

on the history of planning and design for Rock Creek Park hosted by the Committee of 100 for the Capital City, an organization of professional planners and designers in Washington, D.C.

The superintendent and park staff met with District of Columbia and Maryland congressional representatives Eleanor Holmes Norton, Constance Morella, and Chris Van Hollen; the mayor's office; city council members; and 15 advisory neighborhood commissions (ANCs) to inform them of the planning project and to discuss their concerns for the future of the park.

Focus group meetings were held on October 22, 1996 at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments headquarters with representatives of regional transportation and air quality agencies. A second set of meetings was held on February 2, 1997, with air quality and transportation agencies. The purposes of the meetings were to inform the agencies of the planning effort, inquire about sources of information pertinent to planning, share public scoping comments received to date, and discuss the insights and concerns of the agencies regarding their fields of expertise and potential environmental effects.

In the mean time, Newsletter 2 (January 1997) provided updates on public outreach activities and progress on the planning process.

Public comments received during early scoping tended to focus on management of traffic through the park and the idea of returning the park to more natural conditions. In response, the NPS planning team prepared a range of four "preliminary alternative scenarios," characterizing four potential management directions for the park for public comment. The scenarios ranged from continuing current management to extensive closures of roads and removal of recreation facilities to return the park to a more wilderness-like state. The scenarios were published in newsletter 3 (June 1997). The newsletter was distributed to about 1,500 agencies, organizations, and individuals; was placed in area libraries; and was posted on the Internet (www.nps.gov/archive/rocr/gmpnewsletter/).

Public open house meetings were held in conjunction with newsletter 3 at the Rock Creek Nature Center and Planetarium on June 25 and June 28, 1997. About 800 people attended the open houses. Comments were recorded on response forms, flip charts, and through interviews. A court reporter was provided at the open houses.

Approximately 1,000 comments on the preliminary alternative scenarios were received during the official review period that ended August 1, 1997. The range of comments was summarized in newsletter 4 (<http://www.nps.gov/rocr/gmpnewsletter4>) published in January 1998. Public views varied widely about the management of park roads, but there was nearly universal opposition to closing the community gardens, the public horse stables, and the golf course in the park.

After the public comment period ended, additional letters, email, and post cards were received. The large majority of these supported "Alternative 2½," a recommendation developed by a new coalition of organizations entitled People's Alliance for Rock Creek.

Newsletter 5 (June 1998) informed the public of a schedule extension for producing the plan. The newsletter also announced that new alternatives were being developed that did not include closing traditional recreation facilities. The recent discovery in the park of a federally endangered amphipod also was announced.

In November 1998, a letter was sent to everyone on the mailing list announcing an indefinite delay in the production of the draft general management plan and environmental impact statement. The delay

was caused by a congressionally directed reorganization and downsizing of NPS planning, design, and construction programs and personnel.

In January 2001, the Mayor of the District of Columbia sent a letter to the National Park Service suggesting that a new alternative be developed to test weekday vehicular traffic restrictions on sections of upper Beach Drive in non-rush hour periods. This led to the development of Alternative D, Mid-Weekday Recreation Enhancement.

A notice of availability for the draft GMP was published in the *Federal Register* on March 14, 2003, informing the public it was available for review and that comments would be accepted until July 15, 2003.

Members of the public spoke during two public hearings, on May 20 and May 22, 2003. Approximately 300 people attended these meetings. The public commented in writing, e-mail, and on the NPS' Internet site. The National Park Service received more than 3,000 communications on the draft general management plan and environmental impact statement that contained more than 5,000 individual comments.

During the public comment period the District of Columbia's City Council passed an emergency resolution R15-122 on June 3, 2003. The resolution is called "Sense of the Council on the National Park Service's Draft General Management Plan for Rock Creek Park Emergency Resolution of 2003". Montgomery County also passed a resolution on July 8, 2003 called "County Support for Maintaining the Existing Traffic Management Pattern on Beach Drive in Rock Creek Park."

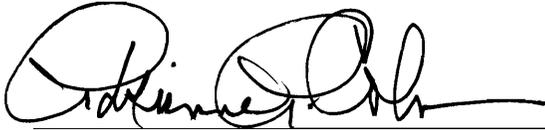
From 2003 to 2005, the National Park Service carefully analyzed the results of more than 5,000 individual comments from the public on the draft plan and in particular the concerns of the District of Columbia City Council and Montgomery County with regard to emergency situations such as that of September 11, 2001. A decision was made to change the preferred alternative to a modified Alternative A, from one which included lane reversals on Beach Drive during rush hour periods to one with traffic calming devices and additional directional signs to slow down traffic.

Following publication of notification in the *Federal Register* on December 13, 2005, the National Park Service provided the public with a 60-day period to comment on the final general management plan and environmental impact statement. The National Park Service received 376 written communications (letters and e-mail) that included 570 individual comments. Substantive comments were defined and considered along with other information as the foundation for this Record of Decision.

CONCLUSION

The NPS determines that Alternative A, the preferred alternative in the final general management plan, provides a comprehensive and balanced method for meeting the National Park Service's purposes, goals, and criteria for managing Rock Creek Park and the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway and for meeting national environmental policy goals. The selection of Alternative A, as reflected by the analysis contained in the environmental impact statement, would not result in the impairment of park resources and would allow the NPS to conserve park resources and provide for their enjoyment by visitors at this time. In making its decision to implement alternative A, the NPS considered the information and analysis contained in the draft and final GMP/EIS and comments from the public, Federal, state and local agencies and elected officials, taking into account applicable law, regulation and NPS policy.

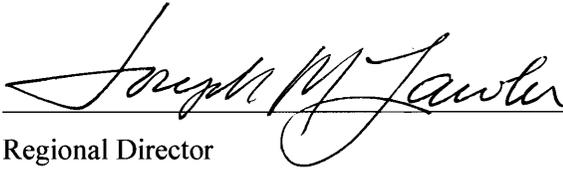
Recommended:



Date 6/5/07

Superintendent
Rock Creek Park

Approved:



Date 6/6/07

Regional Director
National Capital Region, National Park Service