

Military and Veteran Engagement

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Strategy Report

ON THE COVER

Top photograph:

Service members receive their United States citizenship in a ceremony at Mount Rainier National Park.

Middle Photograph:

Soldier Ride is a four-day cycling experience where veterans meet other warriors like them, and push their limits beyond what they think is possible.

Bottom Photograph:

Veteran Fire Crews prevent and combat wildfires in many western parks.

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Military and Veteran Engagement Strategy

The National Park Service is committed to providing a robust array of opportunities for service members*, veterans, and their families to experience parks as places of health and wellness, service and stewardship, education and recreation, employment and job skills training, and honor and celebration of their history and service. Through partnership and collaboration with the U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and dozens of nonprofit organizations, the National Park Service will strive to achieve the goals and objectives outlined in this plan.

Throughout the country, more than 100 national parks have direct connections to American military history, including frontier forts and Cold War sites, battlefields and national cemeteries, memorials and patriotic shrines. These special places pay tribute to service members and veterans and are reminders of their selfless service and sacrifice throughout the history of the nation and the values, ideals, and freedoms that the military protects at home and abroad.

This strategic plan describes six focus areas to engage service members and veterans at a scale not seen before on public lands and waters. Our priorities, strategic goals, and actions align with Department of the Interior priorities, which define the operational focus of this initiative and which will make the National Park Service a stronger organization providing better services and programs for veterans and military families. In doing so, the National Park Service is connecting with this important constituency in new and deeper ways, strengthening already established networks that support this community, and acting as a conduit for positive change.

The National Park Service is committed to providing a robust array of opportunities for service members*, veterans, and their families.

All 400+ national parks are natural and ideal places for engagement with active duty service military members, veterans, and their families. From the colonial Minutemen who stood in defense of their rights, homes, and families near the North Bridge to modern warriors on a ruck march through Denali

National Park and Preserve, the history of the National Park Service is interwoven with that of the United States military.



USS Arizona pre-dive briefing.
NPS Photo by Luis Lamar

NPS Strategic Focus Areas

Health and Wellness: Improve the overall health and wellness of service members*, veterans, and their families by offering park-based services and programs to address physical, mental, and spiritual health, and social well-being.

Service and Stewardship: Enhance civic pride and protect park resources by providing opportunities for continued public service through volunteerism while addressing deferred maintenance at the parks.

Education and Family: Increase awareness of, and participation in, National Park Service and partner education programs and outreach for educators and schools located on or near military installations.

Employment and Job Skills Training: Provide meaningful work experience on public lands and waters via service corps, internships, and/or employment that supports access to civilian careers in public, private or non-profit sectors.

Honor and Ceremony: Facilitate increased use of park sites for ceremonies that honor military service and achievements that celebrate active duty and veteran career accomplishments.

Performance Training: Provide inspiring and challenging opportunities for active duty service members to train for endurance, technical climbing skills, winter travel, wilderness navigation, strategic thinking, and more.

Agency Practices: Strong communication strategy, partnerships, and agency culture are critical to meeting the objectives of the program focus areas described above.

** Service members include all branches of the armed forces - Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, Merchant Marines, National Guard, Navy, and Reservists.*



Soldier Ride is a four-day cycling experience where veterans meet other warriors like them, and push their limits beyond what they think is possible.

Strategic Focus Areas, Goals, Objectives

Health and Wellness

National parks are ideal locations for people to learn about and practice healthy lifestyles in fun and enjoyable ways.

Supporting the overall health and wellness of service members, veterans, and their families is the paramount objective of the National Park Service strategy. The opportunities for positive engagement on public lands for veterans and service members are limitless. National parks are ideal locations for people to learn about and practice healthy lifestyles in fun and enjoyable ways, and to forge deep and lasting connections with, and enhance stewardship of, national parks. Creating, enhancing, and highlighting programs and opportunities directed at the overall health and wellness of these audiences benefits both participants and parks.

Goal 1: The overall health, wellness, and readiness of *service members* and their families improve through a broad array of partnerships and programs provided by the National Park Service in parks and communities, as well as military installations.

Objective 1.1: Develop an implementation and evaluation plan in collaboration with the Department of Defense to ensure alignment between National Park Service *Healthy Parks Healthy People* and Department of Defense Operation Live Well strategic actions at local, state, and national levels.

Objective 1.2: Identify and engage parks and partners to advance National Park Service support for and participation in *Operation Live Well*.

Objective 1.3: Create a database and map of all known active duty Department of Defense facilities and their proximity to national parks.

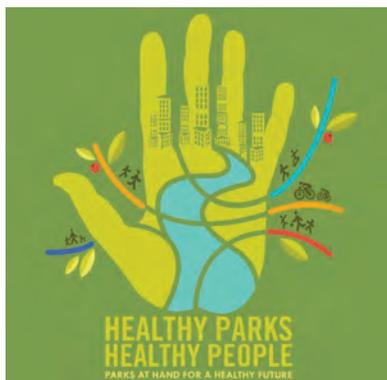
Objective 1.4: Develop contacts and programs with Morale, Welfare, and Recreation offices and create standard communication template to encourage nearby national parks to provide basic information.

Objective 1.5: Promote national expansion of *Healthy Parks Healthy People* promising practices in parks and communities in collaboration with DOD's Building Healthy Military Communities pilot projects in seven states.

Operation Live Well

The National Park Service *Healthy Parks Healthy People* and DOD's *Operation Live Well* are joining forces in the

development and execution of Building Healthy Military Communities pilots in seven states. These pilots are a multi-year effort to better understand and address the unique challenges faced by dispersed service members that impact readiness and resilience of service members and their families.



Goal 2: The overall health and wellness of *veterans* and their families improves through a broad array of partnerships and programs provided at National Park Service sites.

Objective 2.1: Partner with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to survey veterans and partners regarding barriers to participation in National Park Service recreation programs.

Objective 2.2: Conduct a servicewide inventory of National Park Service therapeutic and adaptive recreation programs serving veterans.

Objective 2.3: Identify and inventory foundations and partner organizations currently working with veterans and their families in national parks or related programs to deliver therapeutic and adaptive recreation services.

Objective 2.4: Identify and inventory *potential* foundations and partner organizations not currently working with veterans and their families in our parks or programs that could deliver therapeutic and adaptive recreation services.

Objective 2.5: Analyze the recreation and partner inventories and amplify best practices, fill existing gaps, and develop new partnerships to better serve veterans and their families.

Objective 2.6: Develop contacts and programs with Morale, Welfare, and Recreation offices and create standard communication template to encourage nearby national parks to provide basic information.

Recreation Abounds

Active duty service members and veterans find nearly limitless opportunities for recreational pursuits in national parks and on other public lands and waters. Vets on the River is a successful program at St. Croix National Scenic River, Wisconsin, providing paddling and fishing camaraderie.



Service and Stewardship

These service opportunities also enhance community and camaraderie which aid in meeting health and wellness objectives.

Service members and veterans have already demonstrated personal commitment to country and public service. In many cases, a natural next step is volunteer service on public lands. Active duty teams from military installations as well as veteran groups and individuals can have a significant impact on visitor experience, deferred maintenance backlog, and many other National Park Service organizational needs. These service opportunities also enhance community and camaraderie which aid in meeting health and wellness objectives identified in this strategy. From trained veteran volunteers assisting in hurricane recovery with a partner like Team Rubicon to active duty service members performing trail maintenance in a park near their installation, connecting skilled and committed individuals with park-based projects and programs benefits all.

Goal 3: Enrich the lives of veterans, service members, and their families while preserving and enhancing park infrastructure, resources, and programs through a culture of service and stewardship within the larger context of national volunteerism.

Objective 3.1: Identify and inventory all national foundations and partner organizations currently working with active duty service members, veterans and their families to volunteer on public lands.

Objective 3.2: Engage and collaborate with military colleges and academies and Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) programs to share volunteer service opportunities in parks.

Objective 3.3: Provide a variety of service opportunities to engage active duty and reserve service members, veterans, and their families.

Objective 3.4: Expand participation in local, national, and international volunteerism/service days and military appreciation days to promote pride in citizenship and service.

Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, Florida

The Fort Caroline National Memorial floating dock had been substantially damaged by multiple hurricanes closing the dock to the public. The United States Coast Guard provided the USCG-C (Cutter) HAMMER which included crane services, skilled mechanical engineering crews, dive safety, and general support to conduct the dock repairs. This partnership provided the USCG valuable mission essential training and provided the NPS with a functioning repaired floating dock. This partnership saved the NPS approximately over half a million dollars in services provided.



Making W.A.V.E.S.

The Wounded American Veterans Experience Scuba (WAVES) project provides opportunities for veterans to acquire or expand their scuba diving skills while also helping protect and inventory the vast array of National Park Service submerged resources in places like Lake Mead and the USS Arizona Memorial.



David Ortiz, a T-10 complete paraplegic, flies his service flag over the 14" guns of the USS Arizona.
NPS Photo by Brett Seymour.



W.A.V.E.S. volunteers work with NPS staff to protect important submerged resources.

Education and Family

Connection to parks and public lands have the potential to be a consistent feature in their life in and out of school.

Thousands of spouses, school age children, and other family members live on or near installations across the U.S. and around the world. Students frequently change schools and often have little consistency throughout the course of their K-12 education. Connection to parks and public lands have the potential to be a consistent feature in their life in and out of school. Too often installations and neighboring schools are rural and lack the resources they deserve to educate the children of service members. Field trips, distance learning, Boy and Girl Scout programs, Teacher Ranger Teacher opportunities, and more can connect these families to public lands as classrooms and places of fun, adventure, and learning.

Goal 4: Increase understanding and active use of national parks by military families through participation in National Park Service and partner programs with schools and homeschooling groups, YMCAs, child care centers, Scouts, and other family and child audiences located on or near military installations.



Blue Star Families and the National Park Service partner to support active-duty military families who are often separated for long periods of time due to deployments.

Objective 4.1: Assemble a database of K-12 schools located on or near military installations that primarily serve children of military personnel.

Objective 4.2: Partner with Department of Defense Education Activity program to create programming specific to military families.

Objective 4.3: Develop collaborative relationships with Boy/Girl Scouts, YMCAs, Boys/Girls Clubs, and other organizations working with military families to increase awareness of agency education and recreation program opportunities.

Objective 4.4: Facilitate access to partner programs such as National History Day, Moody Math Challenge, and National Writing Project.

Objective 4.5: Engage educators from military-serving schools in Teacher Ranger Teacher Program and National Park Teacher Network.

Objective 4.6: Collaborate with installations to provide lifelong learning opportunities for adults; targeting those currently serving, military spouses, veterans, and their families.

A Family That Fishes Together...

Programs like Junior Ranger Angler bring military families together for fishing as seen here on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Working with Department of Defense Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programs the National Park Service can also connect with military families through scouting, YMCAs, and other partnerships.



A family enjoys a Jr. Angler program at Constitution Gardens, Washington, D.C.

Opportunities Through Education

Students from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA brave the elements on a field trip with a park ranger to Mount Rainier National Park. Through site visits and distance learning, National Park Service educators are expanding their reach to students of military families across the country. While military families may endure many relocations in their lifetime, access to national parks and public lands is a constant.



Students from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA explore winter in Mount Rainier National Park with a ranger.

Workforce and Job Skills Training

The National Park Service has a strong record of employing individuals and their spouses who have served in the military. Currently, more than 5,800 veterans are employed by the National Park Service, comprising 28 percent of the workforce. The wide range of opportunities in natural and cultural resource conservation, law enforcement, maintenance, information technology, and administration align particularly well with the experience and interest of many military veterans.

The National Park Service has a strong record of employing individuals and their spouses who have served in the military.

More than a path to federal employment, work experience on public lands prepares veterans for a myriad of job opportunities in the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Internships, fellowships, seasonal work, resume workshops, and skills training are all potential opportunities provided by public land management agencies to incorporate veterans into the civilian workforce.

Goal 5: Successfully assist veterans and their spouses with the transition into the civilian workforce through skills training, job matching, and employment opportunities with public land management agencies.

Objective 5.1: Support new and current veteran employees in the National Park Service through mentoring and continued training and developmental opportunities.

Objective 5.2: Increase the number of veterans in seasonal and career NPS positions.

Objective 5.3: Educate hiring officials and Human Resource professionals on current veterans and military spouse hiring authorities and best-practices in onboarding.

Objective 5.4: Inform, educate, and communicate with external military transition programs and career counselors regarding hiring programs, special hiring authorities, and targeted vacancy announcements.

Objective 5.5: Craft position descriptions and vacancy announcements for targeted vacancies that provide career ladder opportunities for recently separated veterans.



Veteran Trades Apprenticeship Program members restore a historic home.



Veteran Fire Crews prevent and combat wildfires in many western parks.

Objective 5.6: Develop and enhance employment and training opportunities through service and conservation corps programs. Specifically target veterans who have physical, mental and/or emotional disabilities.

Objective 5.7: Improve National Park Service employee knowledge and understanding of military/veteran culture.

The Veteran Trades Apprenticeship and Veteran Fire Corps are new and innovative programs that provide job skills and experiences that prepare veterans for post-military careers in the public or private sector. Whether helping fight or prevent increasing numbers of wildfires or addressing the National Park Service deferred maintenance backlog through historic preservation, veterans bring a work ethic and skill set that matches well with these programs.



Veteran Trades Apprentice Corps members work on historic preservation project with local students at Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, GA, TN.



Traditional Trades Apprenticeship Veteran Michael Payne provides on-site conservation work on a wayside exhibit.

Honor and Ceremony

National park sites are premiere and highly sought-after locations to honor military service and sacrifice.

National park sites and other public lands are often ideal settings for military ceremonies such as reenlistments, commissionings, promotions, retirements, change of command, naturalization, or military band concerts. So too are they the right place to publicly honor the contributions and sacrifice of service members, veterans, and their families. Supporting military ceremonies and opportunities for honor in parks provide a link between past military history and current military service.

Goal 6: National park sites are premiere and highly sought-after locations to honor military service and sacrifice.

Objective 6.1: Increase the use of National Park Service sites for military ceremonies.

Objective 6.2: Serve as a point of contact for active duty military members, veterans, and their families to facilitate participation in ceremonies, events and programs honoring military service.

Objective 6.3: Establish relationships with the U.S. Department of Defense, Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programs and services, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, veteran-serving organizations, and other nonprofit organizations to expand awareness and use of national park sites for military ceremonies.

Objective 6.4: Expand service-wide efforts to recognize national holidays such as Memorial Day and Veterans Day and incorporate honor-related programming and ceremonial elements.

Objective 6.5: Create a toolkit to educate and empower National Park Service employees to work with military members and veterans, and their families to provide locations and support for ceremonies as well as events and programming to honor military service.

Objective 6.6: Develop and deploy marketing collateral (posters, signs, stickers, etc.) fostering an overarching message of honoring those who serve and have served.



Honor Flight participants lay wreaths at the World War II Memorial, National Mall and Memorial Parks. Washington, DC

Objective 6.7: Utilize internal and external NPS communication tools such as InsideNPS and NPS.gov to raise awareness, empower employees and the public, and support consistent sharing of information, that is easy to find from a variety of entry points.

Honor ceremonies take place in many national parks to commemorate and remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation. National Park Service staff are proud to stand alongside service members and veterans in honoring them.



Wreath laying at Boston National Historical Park.

Service members often choose national parks like Mount Rainier or the USS Arizona Memorial for commissioning or enlisting ceremonies. National Park Service units also host naturalization ceremonies where active duty service members sometimes join others in becoming citizens of the United States of America.



Service member recommissions atop the fort at San Juan National Historic Site, Puerto Rico.



Service members receive their United States citizenship in a ceremony at Mount Rainier National Park (left and below).



Performance Training

High altitude environments like Denali and Mount Rainier provide exceptional training grounds for certain military specialties.

Utilizing parks for training also introduces service members to national park ideals and mission, creating potential life-long connections.

Historic sites like Gettysburg create unique opportunities for exploring battlefield strategy and tactics. Other parks and public lands provide inspiring and challenging opportunities for service members to train for endurance, technical climbing skills, winter travel, wilderness navigation, strategic thinking, and more. Utilizing parks for training also introduces service members to national park ideals and mission, creating potential life-long connections.

Goal 7: National park sites are premiere and highly sought-after locations for military training.

Objective 7.1: Increase the use of National Park Service sites for military training.

Objective 7.2: Enhance collaboration with Department of Defense on the proper use of parks and public lands as training venues.

Objective 7.3: Increase the number and frequency of staff rides to national parks.

National Park Service battlefields have a variety of lessons to teach service members as well as young people in ROTC.



US Navy personnel attend a ranger led talk.

Communications

Goal 8: Increase participation in National Park Service programs for service members, veterans, and their families, along with increasing partnership support for those programs.

Objective 8.1: Analyze and inventory available internal (InsideNPS, Green/Gray Report, etc) external (social media, web, press release, etc) communication tools.

Objective 8.2: Identify points of contact for each communication channel.

Objective 8.3: Draft a communication plan to achieve stated goal.

Objective 8.4: Identify key initiatives and opportunities to engage the wider military community.

Objective 8.5: Identify ongoing communication and marketing needs of each focus area.



Veterans and military families can use the power of social media platforms such as Facebook to learn more about programs and opportunities on public lands.

Partnerships

Goal 9: Active partnerships increase participation of veteran and service members in public lands programming.

Objective 9.1: Inventory current partnerships working in veteran and military community engagement on public lands and organize according to strategic focus areas.

Objective 9.2: Identify potential new partnerships in support of veteran and military community engagement.

Objective 9.3: Collaborate with the National Park Foundation on funding initiatives where goals of their strategic plan and this plan align.

Objective 9.4: Develop a toolkit to facilitate partner-initiated collaboration with the NPS in support of this strategy.



Volunteer veterans from the organization “The Mission Continues” work with park rangers in Southeast DC to repair a hiker/biker trail. The Mission Continues empowers veterans to continue their service, and empowers communities with veteran talent, skills and preparedness to generate visible impact.

Culture

Goal 10: National Park Service employees have a sound understanding of military and veteran culture which results in a welcoming and effective work and social environment for all.

Objective 10.1: Identify barriers to effective assimilation of veterans into the workforce.

Objective 10.2: Create and implement cultural awareness training on today's military and veterans for non-veterans.

Objective 10.3: Constitute an employee resource group (ERG) to support veterans in the workforce as well as provide cultural awareness opportunities for non-veteran employees.

Objective 10.4: Implement recommendations outlined in the The Call of Duty to Serve at NPS Centennial Veteran Survey Report and Road Map.

Less than ten percent of all U.S. adults are military veterans. (Pew Research Center, 2017) As a result, only a small segment of the population has direct knowledge and experience with the unique culture of our military. Yet when recruiting veterans and

military spouses for employment and designing programming for the wider military community, cultural understanding is essential. This gap in cultural competence is key to success with this, or any strategy, to more effectively engage military and veteran communities.

Putting aside assumptions about this community opens up exciting possibilities. Military members, along with their spouses and children, may be living far from home and away from everything that is familiar. NPS staff and volunteers can welcome them with uniquely suited programming that helps these displaced citizens to form connections to a new environment that may be their home for several years. Veterans, along with their spouses and children, have been asked to pull up roots every few years and serve their country in sometimes difficult and dangerous conditions. They have often experienced many different cultures and environments and been asked to adapt to challenging situations. Developing sensitivity to their unique backgrounds will foster understanding in non-veteran staff members and create a stronger bond between employees and improve service delivery for all.



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Chief, Health Promotion/
Healthy Parks Healthy People,
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Washington Support Office

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Brodie, Kenneth
Senior Advisor Workforce &
Inclusion Directorate,
Washington Support Office

Casey, Kenneth
Project Manager, Office of
Acquisition and Property
Management, Department of
the Interior; *United States Army
Veteran*

Chapple, Reginald
Acting Assistant Director,
Partnerships and Philanthropic
Stewardship

Cohen, Laura
Digital Content Strategist,
Office of Communications,
Washington Support Office

Constantine, Cris
Education Program Manager,
Northeast Regional Office

DeCarlo, Karissa
Partnerships & Philanthropy
Program Specialist, Washington
Support Office; *United States
Air Force Spouse*

Dickinson, Merle (Lee)
Special Park Uses Program
Manager, Washington Support
Office

Funes, Jason
Special Assistant, Office of the
Secretary, Department of the
Interior

Holbrook, Kelsea
Administrative Support Assistant,
Mount Rainier National Park;
United States Army Spouse

Hennessy, Rita
NPS Program Lead, National
Trails System, Washington
Support Office

Kupper, Kathy
Public Affairs Specialist,
Office of Communications,
Washington Support Office

Lee, Karen
Director, Grants and Programs,
National Park Foundation

Loudenslager, Christopher
Acting Superintendent, North
Country National Scenic Trail;
United States Army Veteran

Matthews, Joseph
Washington Support Office

SSgt Loar, Dwight
United States Air Force

McBryant, Carol
Relevancy, Diversity and
Inclusion Strategist, Washington
Support Office

McCabe, Casey
Property and Procurement
Technician, George Washington
Memorial Parkway; *United
States Army Veteran*

McDonald, George
Chief, Youth Programs Division,
Washington Support Office

Medema, Tom
Acting Associate Director,
Interpretation, Education, &
Volunteers

Messenger, Michael
Western Maryland Maintenance
Manager, Chesapeake & Ohio
Canal National Historical Park;
Commander, *United States Navy
Reserve*

**Newman, Sara (CAPT, United
States Public Health Service)**
Director, Office of Public Health,
Washington Support Office

Nguyen, Nhien Tony
Associate Director, Workforce
& Inclusion

Nofield, Stephan
Chief, Rivers, Trails and
Conservation Assistance
Program, Washington Support
Office

Ratcliffe, Robert
Chief, Conservation and
Outdoor Recreation Division,
Washington Support Office

Ripps, Alma
Chief, Office of Policy

Rosenblum, Linda
Education Program Manager,
Washington Support Office

Rowe, Louis
Acting Associate Director,
Visitor & Resource Protection;
*United States Marine Corps
Veteran*

Stein, Jennifer
Program Analyst, Rivers, Trails
& Conservation Assistance
Program

Wendel, Roberta
Interpretive Media Specialist/
Regional Web Manager,
Midwest Region

White, Ernestine
National Youth Employment
Program Coordinator,
Washington Support Office;
United States Navy Veteran

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