1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The National Park Service (NPS) is committed to employing a diverse workforce. Increased representation will be sought for women, minorities, and individuals with disabilities in all occupations and grade levels. It is the policy of the NPS to provide reasonable accommodation to the known disabilities of qualified applicants and employees. Exceptions to accommodation will be considered when it can be demonstrated that an accommodation would: (1) fundamentally alter the nature of the essential functions of the job, or (2) create an undue hardship, and/or (3) cause a direct threat to health and safety.
This Director’s Order establishes the framework for meeting reasonable accommodation requirements in all areas of employment, including: application, hiring, retention, promotion, recognition, and Special Hiring Authority. Within this framework, NPS Human Resources and Equal Opportunity Program officials will take the lead in providing specific guidance and services to applicants, employees, and supervisors and other managers with respect to the provision of reasonable accommodation.

This Director’s Order is a key ingredient of NPS goals to achieve diversity within the organization and provide equal employment opportunities. Supervisors will be accountable for ensuring diversity through reasonable accommodation in all areas of employee selection and development. Supervisors are encouraged to become knowledgeable of the many resources available and to make a complete evaluation of the essential functions of the position as related to the disability before determining a reasonable accommodation. Although the procedures in this Director’s Order give detailed guidance, managers are encouraged to meet or exceed the requirements for reasonable accommodation and general access through innovative techniques.

Managers, supervisors, and employees at all levels must be afforded the necessary support, training, and access to resources which will result in the provision of reasonable accommodation. Reasonable accommodation need not be a time consuming and expensive proposition. Reasonable accommodation could be the reassignment of non-essential duties or providing of a sign language interpreter. The process should not unduly cause added paperwork and multi-level approvals. The process should remain as confidential as possible, between the supervisor and the employee or applicant, with guidance from Human Resources (HR), Equal Opportunity (EO), and Accessibility Coordinating officials. The applicant or employee should be involved in discussions regarding the specific reasonable accommodation to be provided. However, the final determination of a reasonable accommodation is the responsibility of management.

II. AUTHORITY FOR THIS DIRECTOR’S ORDER

General authority to issue this Director’s Order is contained in the NPS Organic Act (16 U.S.C. 1 through 4) and Part 245 of the Department of the Interior Manual. It is prepared in response to the Department’s request (Assistant Secretary’s memo of February 2, 1998, including DOI Equal Opportunity Directive No. 1998-04) that each Bureau have a process for employees with disabilities to request reasonable accommodation to the work environment and a plan for making facilities and programs accessible for people with disabilities. Other specific authorities and requirements governing reasonable accommodation for employees are found in sections 501 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended; Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) regulations at 29 CFR 1613.704 and 1614.203; related EEOC Management Directives; and Department of the Interior regulations at 43 CFR Part 17 Subpart E.

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1 The Job Accommodation Network – a service of the President’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities – has found in its “Accommodation Benefit/Cost Data” cumulative survey tabulated through March 30, 1997, that 81 percent of reasonable accommodations cost less than $1,000 and 21 percent of this 81 percent required no additional cost.
III. DEFINITIONS

This Director’s Order makes reference to legal terms which are critical to understanding NPS responsibilities. The following definitions are taken from EEOC’s Americans With Disabilities Act, Title I Technical Assistance Manual.

**An Individual with a Disability** is one who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; has a record of such an impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment.

**Physical or Mental Impairment** is any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological; musculoskeletal; special sense organs; cardiovascular; reproductive; digestive; genitourinary; hemic and lymphatic; skin; and endocrine; or any mental or psychological disorder, such as mental retardation, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities.

**Major Life Activities** are functions such as caring for one’s self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working.

**Reasonable Accommodation** is any change in the work environment or in the way things are usually done that results in equal employment opportunity for an individual with a disability. An employer must make a reasonable accommodation to the known physical or mental limitations of a qualified applicant or employee with a disability unless it can be shown that the accommodation would:

1. **fundamentally alter** the nature of the essential functions of the job, and/or
2. create an **undue hardship** on the operation of a program, and/or
3. cause a direct **threat to health and safety** of applicant, employee, or others.

Some examples of reasonable accommodation include:

- making existing facilities readily accessible to, and usable by, employees and applicants with a disability;
- job restructuring;
- modifying work schedules;
- reassignment to a vacant position;
- acquiring or modifying equipment or devices;
- adjusting or modifying examinations, training materials, or policies;
- providing qualified readers or interpreters.

**Fundamentally Alter** the nature of the essential functions of a job means to make changes that would require the NPS to provide an altogether different kind of service than that which the NPS typically provides. In illustrating what this means, Congress has indicated that a drug rehab clinic could refuse to treat a person who was not a drug addict, but could not refuse to treat an addict because of positive HIV status. Additionally, “a physician who specializes in treating burns could not refuse to treat a burn victim due to deafness, but could refuse to treat a deaf person, who did not have burns and had some unrelated medical condition.”
**Undue Hardship** is defined as an action that is “excessively costly, extensive, substantial, or disruptive, or that would fundamentally alter the nature or operation of the business.” In determining undue hardship, factors to be considered include the nature and cost of the accommodation in relation to the size, the financial resources, the nature and structure of the employer’s operation, as well as the impact of the accommodation on the specific facility providing the accommodation. Accordingly, whether a particular accommodation will impose an undue hardship must always be determined on a case by case basis.

**Direct Threat to the Health and Safety** of the applicant, employee or others. There is a need to balance the interests of individuals with disabilities against legitimate concerns for public safety. To do this, a determination must be based on an individualized assessment using reasonable judgment that relies on current medical evidence or the best available objective evidence to determine: (1) the nature, duration, and severity of the risk; (2) the probability that the potential injury will actually occur; and (3) whether reasonable modifications of policies, practices, or procedures will mitigate the risk.

**IV. APPLICABILITY OF THIS DIRECTOR’S ORDER**

The requirements for reasonable accommodation apply when individuals meet the eligibility criteria for persons with disabilities, as defined in sections 501 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) regulations at 29 CFR 1613.704 and 1614.203, and related EEOC Management Directives.

In addition, the Department of the Interior has administratively determined (Departmental E.O. Directive 93-07) that it will follow the Americans With Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines, provided by the U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, when such design guidelines are equal to or greater than those of the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards. Since the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) was based on the requirements of section 504, ADA regulations and technical assistance materials (especially Title I) provide additional in-depth resources for implementation of a reasonable accommodation process.

Providing reasonable accommodation need not be a time-consuming and complex proposition. However, there are numerous types of disabilities with specific characteristics that pose special challenges. Therefore, the EEOC, the Department of Justice, and advocacy groups have provided abundant information and guidance. This information and guidance is too voluminous to be included here, but relevant resources will be maintained and available within the WASO and Regional HR, EO, and Accessibility Coordinating offices.

**V. TRAINING**

In order to provide information to all employees concerning accessibility and reasonable accommodation, brief annual training sessions are required by this Director’s Order at each Park/Office. These sessions may include identification of basic access requirements, a review of this Director’s Order, or any other access information. These sessions may be accomplished by a variety of methods including technology-enhanced learning. In addition:
Within thirty (30) days of the effective date of this Director’s Order, each Park/Office will confirm with the WASO Accessibility Management Program (AMP) office the appointment of an Accessibility Coordinator. The Accessibility Coordinator may service more than one Park/Office.

The Accessibility Coordinator, in conjunction with the appropriate EO and HR Specialists, will provide a training session of at least one (1) hour for park or office staff on the basic requirements of this Director’s Order.

WASO HR, EO, and AMP offices will provide various materials such as the EEOC “Employment of People with Disabilities in the Federal Government-A Guide for Managers and Supervisors,” and other resources.

Training will be scheduled and accomplished within 6 months of the effective date of this Director’s Order.

Trainers, usually the Accessibility Coordinator, should notify the regional HR or EO office at least two (2) weeks in advance of such sessions so that staff may be provided with updated information.

The Training and Employee Development Office will develop an in-depth training program on Reasonable Accommodation to be held annually at the Mather Training Center or at other sites in conjunction with the Regional/WASO HR, EO, and Accessibility Coordinators.

The Regional/WASO HR, EO, and Accessibility Coordinators will periodically provide general training on this subject. Such general training may be in conjunction with other NPS or Departmental training.

VI. GENERAL COORDINATION RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Department of the Interior. DOI Bureau heads or their designees, are responsible for implementing the Department’s policy (Departmental E.O. Directive 1998-04) on reasonable accommodation in their bureau. The Departmental Office for Equal Opportunity has retained responsibility for:

1. Providing guidance and assistance to DOI bureaus in the effort to provide reasonable accommodation to qualified employees or applicants with disabilities; and

2. Reviewing appeal decisions made by DOI Offices that are unfavorable to the employee or applicant.

B. WASO NPS. Working with the WASO EO, HR, and AMP offices is the key to the successful operation of an effective reasonable accommodation process. Each office has significant responsibilities relating to its specific mission. However, the EO, HR, and AMP offices must coordinate to ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided in a timely, effective, and confidential manner.

C. Regional Offices. The Regional Office Accessibility Coordinator, EO, and HR officials should meet at least quarterly or as necessary to implement this Director’s Order. The purpose of such meetings is to establish procedures, provide training, coordinate with departmental offices or committees (i.e., DOI Office of Equal Opportunity [OEO], DOI Access Committee, or Facilities Management), coordinate
resolution of differences between supervisors and individuals with disabilities, and coordinate resources. This is intended to provide for regular and periodic discussions of Regional Office officials. Related individual site officials are not required to attend these periodic meetings of the Regional office staff but may be included at the discretion of Regional officials.

In addition, Regional Office HR, EO, and Accessibility Coordinators will conduct, annually, one or more compliance reviews of selected offices or parks. WASO HR, EO, and AMP officials may participate in such reviews from time to time or initiate such a review for oversight purposes.

VII. SPECIFIC DUTIES

Structural accessibility and accessible communication are critical in the reasonable accommodation process. Specific responsibilities for program officials and employees are as follows:

A. Equal Opportunity Program

EO staff at all levels have expertise in the civil rights requirements related to reasonable accommodation, counseling, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), complaint processing/enforcement, and direct access to the highest administrative levels. They also have knowledge and access to technical resources within and outside of the NPS and the Department.

The immediate EO office will be notified by the immediate HR office, within five (5) working days, when a reasonable accommodation cannot be determined or if there is a question by the supervisor as to whether a reasonable accommodation is an undue burden, presents a direct threat to NPS employees or to the general public, or may alter the fundamental nature or the essential functions of the employment duties. In an attempt to resolve the situation before it becomes part of the formal complaint process, the immediate EO office will review the situation and make appropriate recommendations to supervisors and managers.

The immediate EO office or Accessibility Coordinator may also intervene on their own or when requested by HR, to coordinate necessary reasonable accommodation with other offices/parks (i.e., with Department Facilities Management, with inside and outside training centers, with contractors, etc.). When the immediate EO office or Accessibility Coordinator decides to intervene, it must notify the HR office, which will notify the supervisor.

The immediate on-site EO office will schedule meetings, quarterly or as necessary, with the immediate on-site HR and Accessibility Coordinator to assess and coordinate implementation of this Director’s Order.

B. Human Resources Office

The HR office at all levels has expertise in recruiting and in all facets of employment, and administers the Section 501 affirmative action program, employee relations, and the Employee Assistance Program. It also has access to technical resources, such as listed in section IX of this Director’s Order.
The HR office will ensure that recruiting information, vacancy announcements, and other materials indicate that reasonable accommodation will be provided to meet the special needs of qualified applicants or employees when such special needs are known by the agency.

The HR office will also ensure that such materials are available in alternate format (i.e., audio tape, large print, diskette) and that certain communication access services are available to qualified applicants or employees upon request (i.e., sign language interpreters, readers).

When supervisors and applicants or employees report to the immediate HR office that they cannot resolve a particular problem, the HR office will coordinate with the EO office to assess the situation and determine if there are other possible options for reasonable accommodation. This may involve contacting outside consultants as needed. The HR office will provide advisory assistance to supervisors in making a final determination as to whether reasonable accommodation can be made.

The Regional HR office will compile annual statistics on the number and the type of reasonable accommodations and provide such information to the WASO HR office. Supervisors must report such to the Regional HR office, through their immediate HR office, in each case. The Regional HR office will keep a log of these reports without identifying the qualified individual. The Regional HR office will coordinate with the Regional EO, as needed, to discuss issues related to the application or effectiveness of this policy.

C. Accessibility Management Program

The NPS AMP is located in the Washington Office and is part of the Associate Directorship for Park Operations and Education. AMP staff will work with resource persons in each of the Regional Offices and other NPS units to assess the current level of accessibility of various parks, identify the barriers to accessibility, develop policies and guidelines regarding appropriate methods and techniques for improving access, and providing technical assistance and in-service training on cost-effective approaches and program implementation.

The AMP will continue to advance the Service-wide program on accessibility, establish strategies for providing continuing education and technical assistance, and will work with the EO and HR offices, at all levels, to ensure that the reasonable accommodation program is implemented as effectively as possible.

D. Supervisors

Supervisors must:

- Become knowledgeable of the reasonable accommodation guidance in order to comply with the necessary requirements. This includes general knowledge of the various types of disabilities, related terminology, and characteristics.

- Allow input by the applicant or employee in determinations related to reasonable accommodation.

- Avail themselves of the assistance provided by the HR, EO, and Accessibility Coordinators, at all levels, and attend the annual access training.
• Report, through the immediate HR office, all accommodation requests and final resolutions to the appropriate regional HR office verbally or in writing, indicating the type of disability, the reasonable accommodation, and date. The qualified individual will not be named. All such information must be delivered and maintained in the most confidential manner.

E. **Employees**

All employees should be provided an opportunity to become familiar with the reasonable accommodation process and the basic access requirements. All employees have a responsibility to use proper terminology and etiquette when relating to employees, applicants, and visitors to create a hospitable work environment.

F. **Accessibility Coordinator**

Accessibility Coordinators, who service one or more Park/Office, will provide specific guidance for structural and non-structural accessibility to applicants and employees. Accessibility Coordinators will also provide a brief annual update of selected parts of the “504 Self-Evaluation” and “Transition Plan” in order to establish work and budget priorities. The 504 Self-evaluation update includes structural and non-structural items, which need improvement. The Transition Plan update uses the structural aspects of the 504 Self-evaluation and assigns timetables, financial, and other resources for renovation of existing facilities. Both are crucial for responding to accommodation requests and achieving NPS Diversity and GPRA goals. Coordination with Department, contractors, and other Service offices for funding and other resources is essential.

Accessibility Coordinators must become knowledgeable about 504/ADA requirements for provision of reasonable accommodation and access design standards in order to provide guidance to supervisors and facility managers. Accessibility Coordinators must be able to provide basic formal and informal training for employees and management.

G. **Facility Managers**

Facility managers throughout the NPS must ensure that structural accessibility is provided to applicants and employees. Coordination with other NPS offices may be necessary to obtain funding and other resources. Additional resources may be available from the Department and contractors to update the Self-evaluation and Transition Plan and act upon findings.

H. **All Managers**

All NPS managers are responsible for implementing this Director’s Order on reasonable accommodation in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. Managers should be pro-active in the reasonable accommodation process. Managers know they are successfully implementing reasonable accommodation when they:

• provide for reassignment of marginal duties;
• ensure that accessible communication is available;
• provide accessible routes and equipment;
• assist with safety precautions in emergency situations; and
• provide for the specific and effective reasonable accommodation in an efficient manner for the individual applicant or employee with a disability.

I. Contracting Officers

Contracting Officers must be aware of the basic requirements for access and the provision for reasonable accommodation in order to maintain current listings of effective resources such as sign language interpreters and readers. A process, to secure these and other services in a timely manner, should also be established. This process and other resource information will be communicated and readily available to all supervisors and employees. Contracting Officers must also ensure that transportation services meet the necessary access requirements.

J. Office/Park Managers

Office/park managers must provide supervisors and employees time for training and otherwise support the reasonable accommodation process. Advance planning and budgeting should be done to establish priorities for funding to meet the requirements.

VIII. REQUESTS FOR REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

A. Making a Request

1. A request for reasonable accommodation may be made by any applicant or employee with a disability who needs an accommodation to perform the essential functions of the application process or of the job.

2. The applicant/employee request should be made to the supervisor, and may be made either verbally or in writing.

B. Responding to a Request

1. The supervisor of the application process or of the employee must discuss, with the applicant/employee, their specific reasonable accommodation issue and possible accommodations. The final determination rests with “management” but the reasonable accommodation must be effective.

2. The immediate HR and EO office will be promptly notified in any case where the supervisor questions whether an accommodation would fundamentally alter the nature of the essential functions of the job, create an undue hardship, and/or cause a direct threat to health or safety.

3. When an accommodation is provided, the supervisor will report the type of disability and the accommodation to the immediate HR office, for record-keeping purposes. The individual will not be identified in the report.
C. **Notification Procedures**

1. Program, recruiting, vacancy, test, interview, and other communications materials must indicate that reasonable accommodation will be provided for qualified individuals with known disabilities.

2. Applicants and employees with special needs requiring individual assistance or equipment (i.e., readers, voice computers, and sign language interpreters) should contact the supervisor at least one week in advance of a particular need.

3. A contact person within the regional HR office will be designated to coordinate the reasonable accommodation process for applicants and be a resource for supervisors.

D. **Privacy**

1. **Privacy is Critical:** Documentation may be unnecessary when both the disability and the accommodation are obvious. When medical information is required, it will be treated with the utmost consideration for privacy. Medical files must be kept in their own folders separate from other personnel information and in separate file cabinets. This is in accord with 504/ADA Technical Assistance guidance provided by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

2. **Access to Medical Records:** The disclosure of medical information can be made only to those individuals with a demonstrated need to know in order to make an informed management decision regarding the individual's employment or application process.

3. **Consulting with the Applicant/Employee:** In cases where there is a need for medical documentation, the supervisor should consult with the applicant or employee requesting the accommodation to determine necessary information which may be available.

4. **Supervisor Consultations and Reporting:** The supervisor should also consult with the immediate HR or EO office for further assistance and to report, for statistical purposes, the type of disability and the accommodation eventually provided.

4. **Inadequate Documentation:** If a supervisor believes that the medical documentation presented is not adequate, the immediate HR and EO offices must be consulted to review the available medical documentation and make suggestions as to further documentation needed. Where appropriate, a memorandum may be provided the employee or applicant describing the information needed and why it is necessary.

E. **Structural Access**

1. Supervisors confronted with structural access concerns should immediately consult with the immediate HR office, which will work in consultation with the EO staff and Accessibility Coordinators to determine appropriate design requirements and coordinate with other agency officials to provide such structural accommodation.
2. Structural access to NPS facilities affects both visitors and employees with disabilities. Structural access should generally be in place before the need arises. It is timely and much less expensive to provide structural access during initial or subsequent construction. For existing facilities, 504 regulations require a site evaluation and a Transition Plan in order to provide structural access before the need arises.

3. Structural access must meet the more stringent requirements of either the Uniform Accessibilty Standards (UFAS) or the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG). At the request of the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Department of the Interior has administratively determined that the design standards for Federally conducted programs will be ADAAG where ADAAG is equal to or greater than UFAS. This policy currently ensures that the most recent design standards established by the Access Board are implemented. UFAS is the current referenced standard in most agency 504 regulations. The DOJ has indicated that sometime in the future it will propose that all agency 504 regulations be revised to reflect the most current design standards.

4. NPS designers, planners, and program managers must ensure that any new construction and alterations fully meet this administrative access design guidance.

5. NPS contracting officers and other officials must ensure that all contracts or agreements provide for contractors and service providers to follow the regulatory requirements of section 504 and the current administratively established design guidance.

6. Immediate office and site Accessibility Coordinators should accomplish a site evaluation at least once per year in order to update their respective site Transition Plans. A Transition Plan describes the structural modifications that are required for the removal of barriers for access. A transition plan should contain at least the following elements:

- A list of the physical barriers in the site’s facilities that limit accessibility to its programs, activities, or services to individuals with disabilities;
- An outline of the methods to be utilized to remove these barriers;
- The time schedule for achieving compliance; and
- The name of the official responsible for the Plan’s implementation.

In addition, Accessibility Coordinators should be involved in the review and oversight of facility construction and or alterations to assist with compliance design issues.

F. Access for Effective Communication

1. The HR office, at all levels, must be prepared to effectively communicate with individuals, who may have various types of disabilities, in all facets of the application and employment process.

2. Applications and announcements should be available in alternative formats. A Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) should be available for effective and private communication with hard of hearing and deaf applicants and employees. Other assistive devices and services should be made available in a timely manner.
G. Financial Resources

1. The Regional Director, in consultation with the Regional HR, EO, and Accessibility Coordinator, should ensure that appropriate financial resources for the provision of reasonable accommodation (such as provision of access to general employee gatherings, for costs of structural access, and to pay for more costly equipment) are provided either by the affected office or park or a Regional general fund).

2. Responsibility for costs of providing reasonable accommodation, as any other expenditure, must be adequately addressed by the Regional Director and each individual site manager to ensure the timely and effective implementation of the accommodation process. New construction, alteration, and maintenance of facilities should be considered a priority in the budget process based on access and safety concerns for applicants, employees, and visitors with a disability.

H. Technical Assistance and Resources

1. The Regional Office and WASO HR, EO, and Accessibility Coordinators will provide technical assistance. In addition, Regional and site officials will maintain appropriate lists of resources and stand ready to provide direct assistance to applicants, supervisors, and employees.

2. Regional and on-site Accessibility Coordinators and other officials must also be ready to provide direct assistance and support to supervisors and employees. Park staffs have a responsibility to develop and maintain a network of information and service resources within their own community (i.e., sign language interpreters and readers).

3. In their periodic meetings, Regional Office HR, EO and Accessibility Coordinators will review all aspects of the reasonable accommodation process, especially related to the provision of technical assistance and the maintenance of adequate resources.

4. As previously indicated, each year, Regional Office HR, EO and Accessibility Coordinators will conduct one or more compliance reviews of selected offices or parks. WASO HR, EO, and AMP officials may participate in such reviews from time to time or initiate such a review for oversight purposes. Each compliance review will also include technical assistance sessions.

IX. INTER-BUREAU AND INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION

A. In order to increase awareness and availability of current technology and other resources, HR, EO, and Accessibility Coordinators, at all levels, will establish and maintain contacts with other bureaus and offices within the Department, DOJ, Department of Transportation (DOT), the Access Board, OPM, and organizations related to individuals with disabilities.

B. The WASO and Regional HR offices, as appropriate, will provide to all offices/parks announcements of meetings or training related to the provision of reasonable accommodation.
X. PRIMARY RESOURCES FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

The most recent updates of the following manuals and reference materials are recommended for managers and trainers as critical information in the Service’s efforts to provide reasonable accommodation for its applicants and employees:

Email Address: www.eeoc.gov (go to related sites and select specific documents).


CFR 43 Part 17 Subpart E – Enforcement of Non-discrimination on the Basis of Disability in Programs or Activities Conducted by the Department of the Interior.


Opening Doors to Ability; President’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities; Educational Kit 1998.

Accommodating Individuals with Asthma, Allergies, Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, Fragrance or Tobacco Smoke Sensitivity; President’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities Job Accommodation Network; April 1997.


NPS Preservation Brief 32; September 1993

Director’s Order #42: Accessibility for People with Disabilities in National Park Service Facilities, Programs and Services

Director’s Order #57: Occupational Medical Standards, Health and Fitness

---------- End of Director’s Order ----------