



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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I. Purpose and Background

Proper management of the National Park System requires accurate, science-based understanding of the relationships between people and parks in order to protect park resources unimpaired and provide for public enjoyment. Social science research in support of the National Park Service (NPS) mission is an important function that provides new and helpful information upon which to base management decisions. The purpose of this Director's Order is to delineate the policies, procedures, and responsibilities for social science in the National Park System under jurisdiction of the NPS Social Science Program.

In February 1996, the National Park Service approved a plan for NPS social science entitled *Usable Knowledge: A Plan for Furthering Social Science and the National Parks*. The NPS Social Science Program is led by a Visiting Chief Social Scientist, who works under the direction of the Associate Director, Natural Resource Stewardship and Science. A small Washington, DC office coordinates and provides technical assistance for social science research in the National Park System.

For the purposes of this Director's Order, social science under the jurisdiction of the NPS Social Science Program includes the disciplines of economics, geography, psychology, political science, and sociology, as well as appropriate interdisciplinary research fields. The Associate Director for Natural Resource Stewardship and Science manages activities related to these scientific disciplines.

Economics (both macro- and micro-economics) treats markets, industries, and economies as key units of study; the driving force of change is economic value broadly defined. Economics can aid NPS managers through studies of park economic impacts, the costs and benefits of park policies, and the role of parks in the tourism industry and national economy.

Geography (specifically human geography) treats regions, landscapes, and other spatial units (governmental, ecological, and so forth) as critical. The central concern is the spatial distribution of people, resources, and culture. Geography can aid NPS managers through studies of tourist travel patterns, regional development, and human impacts on park resources, both natural and cultural.

Psychology has as its key unit the individual, and communication is a central driving force. Psychology can assist NPS managers through studies of visitor experiences, interpretive media and other forms of park-related communication.

Political science focuses upon institutions of state (at many levels); the central engine of change to many political scientists is power and its use. Political science can benefit NPS managers through studies of public participation in park planning, the role of local communities and interest groups, and improving organizational effectiveness.

Sociology treats social groups, organizations and communities as key units of study, with human behavior its central concern. Sociology can aid NPS managers through studies of demographic trends, visitor behavior and public opinion regarding park policies.

Archeology and cultural anthropology/ethnography are social sciences under the management of the Associate Director for Cultural Resources and are not covered by this Director's Order. Both respond to legislative and policy mandates for data that culturally informs management and planning decisions. Archeology focuses on historic and prehistoric peoples and their resource uses. Cultural anthropology/ethnography focuses on relationships between park resources and present-day peoples with traditional associations to them. Cooperating with park-associated peoples, including Native Americans, African Americans and Hispanic communities, ethnography identifies traditionally valued places and the uses and meanings people assign to cultural and natural resources. See *Management Policies*, especially Chapters 1, 2, 5, and 8,

Director's Order 28, and Chapters 6 and 10 of the Cultural Resources Management Guideline (NPS-28) for additional assistance.

Social sciences are also important partners with biological and physical sciences in interdisciplinary research. Fields such as environmental economics, conservation biology, and human ecology have emerged as important scientific endeavors that are relevant to the NPS. Interdisciplinary research, such as studies of visitor impacts upon wildlife, or the impacts of ecosystem management policies, often requires the application of social sciences.

II. Authorities

The authority to issue this Director's Order is contained in 16 U.S.C. 1 through 4 (NPS Organic Act of 1916). Part 245 of the Department of the Interior Manual delegates to the Director of the National Park Service the Secretary of the Interior's authority to supervise, manage, and operate the National Park System.

The National Parks Omnibus Management Act of 1998 ([P.L. 105-391, Sec. 202; 16 U.S.C. 5932](#)) requires that the management of units of the National Park System be enhanced by the availability and utilization of a broad program of the highest quality science and information.

III. Social Science Policies and Procedures

The following guidance is specified for social science research:

A. Applicable policies

NPS use of social science will be subject to all the policies contained in *NPS Management Policies*. The most relevant sections of *Management Policies* include: Chapter 1; Chapter 2; Chapter 4 (4.1 General Management Concepts; 4.2 Studies and Collections; 4.2.1 NPS-conducted or-sponsored Inventory, Monitoring, and Research Studies; and 4.2.2 Independent Studies); Chapter 5 (5.1.1 National Park Service Research; and 5.1.2 Independent Research); Chapter 6 (6.3.5 Minimum Requirement; and 6.3.6 Scientific Activities in Wilderness, including 6.3.6.1 General Policy, and 6.3.6.2 Monitoring Wilderness Resources); Chapter 7 (7.5.4 Research); Chapter 8 (8.2 Visitor Use; 8.2.6.1 Recreation Fees; and 8.11 Social Science Studies, including 8.11.1 General, 8.11.2 NPS-supported Studies, 8.11.3 Independent and Commercial Studies, and 8.11.4 Management and Conduct of Studies). Policy in the form of regulations covering the conduct of research in parks is published in Title 36, Section 2.5 of the Code of Federal Regulations. Policy on reduction of paperwork is published in Title 5, Part 1320 of the Code of Federal Regulations. Policy on protection of human subjects is published in Title 45, Part 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations. Application procedures and requirements for the NPS Research Permit and Reporting System are available through <http://science.nature.nps.gov/research>.

B. Reference Manual

The Associate Director for Natural Resource Stewardship and Science will develop and maintain a reference manual to provide more detailed guidance on conducting scientific research in the National Park System.

C. Needs Assessment

Park units are encouraged to conduct needs assessments to prioritize social science research and technical assistance needs. Needs may be identified in management plans, social science research plans, environmental compliance documents, or other planning or management documents.

D. Contracting and Agreements

There are many options available to park units to secure social science research. These include (but are not limited to) private contractors, universities, and federal scientists. Park units can use contracting, cooperative agreements, or interagency agreements to arrange for social science research and/or technical assistance. The NPS Social Science Program can provide assistance, as requested, in matching NPS units' research needs with expertise in the social scientific community, and provide technical review of proposals, scopes of work, or study plans.

E. Research Permits

All social science research projects undertaken in parks must obtain any permits required by parks. Additional guidance on the issuance of research permits is found in [36 CFR 2.5](#) and through <http://science.nature.nps.gov/research>.

F. Data Collection and Paperwork Reduction Act Compliance

To the extent that a park unit or researcher uses a survey or other instrument to collect information from the public, and the research is funded or sponsored (e.g., providing significant in-kind resources) by the federal government, the park unit or researcher must comply with the Paperwork Reduction Act and its implementing regulations (5 CFR Part 1320). If a study is funded or sponsored by the NPS, compliance requires the submission of an information collection proposal to the NPS Social Science Program, and approval by the NPS and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The normal review process required by OMB takes approximately six months. An expedited approval process exists for certain types of social science studies and is available through the NPS Social Science Program. Detailed guidelines and assistance regarding the OMB approval process are available from the NPS Social Science Program.

NPS-funded or sponsored proposals to collect information from the public for research in the disciplines covered by this Director's Order must be reviewed by the NPS Social Science Program. Paperwork Reduction Act compliance may be sought through another federal agency only if the NPS is not funding or sponsoring the research. An exception is in cases where the NPS funds a study through an interagency agreement with another federal agency. In such cases, that agency's OMB approval process may be used.

G. Study Proposals

Social science research projects funded by the NPS must be based on a study proposal that contains, at a minimum, the following elements: (1) clearly stated research objectives, (2) a description of research methods, (3) a description of research products, (4) an identification of all permits, Paperwork Reduction Act compliance, and other procedural requirements that must be met before the research may proceed, and (5) a realistic timeline identifying key project milestones and due dates for deliverables. More detailed guidelines or additional guidance on

study proposals can be found at <<http://science.nature.nps.gov/research>>. The NPS Social Science Program is available, as requested, to assist by providing technical review of study proposals.

H. Ethical Guidelines

In conducting research in the units of the National Park System and/or funded by the NPS, social science researchers will follow the ethical guidelines of their respective scientific discipline(s). It is the responsibility of the researcher to know and adhere to these ethical guidelines. Complete copies of the ethical guidelines produced by professional associations for each of the disciplines covered by this Director's Order are kept on file with the NPS Social Science Program, available through <http://www.nps.gov/socialscience> and are also available upon request. In addition, the following general ethical guidelines apply to social science research conducted in units of the National Park System, and/or funded by the National Park Service.

1. Confidentiality

The protection of confidential information collected from the public must be ensured, pursuant to the Privacy Act (P.L. 93-579, as amended). When gathering confidential information, social science researchers should take into account the long-term uses of the information, including its potential placement in public archives or the examination of the information by other researchers or practitioners.

2. Informed Consent

Social science researchers cannot involve a human being as a subject in research without the informed consent of the subject, except as otherwise specified in the ethical codes of the professional associations, 45 CFR Part 46 (regulations regarding research involving human subjects), the policies of their host institution, and the OMB review process.

I. Peer Review

All social science research funded by the National Park Service must undergo appropriate peer review. Peer review is defined as a formal review in writing provided by one or more scientists knowledgeable in the field of study. Peer review can occur at different stages of the research process, from study design to final report. Park units should specify, before approving a study proposal, the peer review procedures that will be used. The NPS Social Science Program can provide, as requested, assistance in conducting peer reviews.

J. Reporting

All social science research conducted in units of the National Park System or funded by the NPS must be reported annually, using the NPS Investigator's Annual Reporting system. Researchers working under park-specific scientific research permits will be required to submit summaries of their research, datasets, appropriate copies of all documentation, and final reports to the park as described in the terms of their permit. The NPS Research Permit and Reporting System is available at <<http://science.nature.nps.gov/research>>. Researchers are also encouraged to submit these materials to the NPS Social Science Program which maintains a social science research archive of such materials.

IV. Roles and Responsibilities

A. Superintendents

Superintendents are responsible for implementing this Director's Order in their park unit.

B. Regions and Support Offices

Regions and support offices will provide technical assistance and management oversight to park units undertaking social science research and serve a liaison role in assisting parks with obtaining social science research.

C. Associate Director for Natural Resource Stewardship and Science (ADNRSS)

The ADNRSS will appoint the Visiting Chief Social Scientist and provide oversight and guidance for the NPS Social Science Program. The ADNRSS will develop and maintain a reference manual to provide more detailed guidance on conducting scientific research in the National Park System.

D. Visiting Chief Social Scientist (VCSS)

The Visiting Chief Social Scientist will report to the Associate Director for Natural Resource Stewardship and Science. The Visiting Chief Social Scientist will:

- 1) Provide leadership and direction to the social science activities of the NPS;
- 2) Manage the NPS Social Science Program;
- 3) Serve as a liaison with other science and related programs of the NPS (such as technical assistance programs, central offices and the Applied Ethnography Program);
- 4) Act as a liaison with the USGS, the Department of the Interior, and other federal agencies on social science activities;
- 5) Represent the NPS to and within the scientific community;
- 6) Direct a research program related to national needs of the NPS;
- 7) Serve as a visiting scholar;
- 8) Develop funding initiatives and obtains external grants to support NPS research;
- 9) Perform other tasks as assigned by the ADNRSS; and
- 10) Advise the Director and National Leadership Council on social science issues.

E. Social Science Program Office

The NPS Social Science Program office is based in the NPS Washington Office and supervised by the Visiting Chief Social Scientist. The NPS Social Science Program conducts and promotes state-of-the-art social science related to the mission of the National Park Service for the purpose of delivering usable knowledge to NPS managers and the public. The NPS Social Science Program will:

- 1) Provide review and NPS approval of submissions to OMB for OMB clearance of social science information collections;
- 2) Issue requests for proposals for Service-wide social science needs, and manages the resulting activities;
- 3) Assist park units and programs in developing social science research plans;
- 4) Provide social science technical assistance to parks, park clusters, support offices, regional offices, the Department of the Interior (DOI), and NPS partners; and
- 5) Provide oversight and support for the Visitor Services Project and the Urban Recreation Research Center (URRC).

F. Visitor Services Project

The Visitor Services Project (VSP) is managed via a cooperative agreement with a university and provides NPS managers with scientific information about visitors that can be used to improve visitor services and protect park resources. The VSP conducts several visitor studies each year. The VSP Advisory Committee, with members selected by the ADNRS, will meet at least once a year to recommend to the VCSS and ADNRS a list of NPS units for in-depth visitor studies in the forthcoming year. The VSP also manages the Visitor Survey Card program used for annual Government Performance and Review Act-based evaluation of all the NPS units.

G. Urban Recreation Research Center

The Urban Recreation Research Center (URRC) is managed via a cooperative agreement with a university and provides social science research, technical assistance, and educational opportunities for urban units of the National Park System. The URRC research program will concentrate on management issues related to urban recreation sites of the National Park System, the needs of special populations, and urban recreation demand.

-----End of Director's Order-----