



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

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Policy Memorandum 24-02

To: National Park Service Senior Leadership
Superintendents

From: Director /s/ *Charles F. Sams III*, 08/19/2024

Subject: Landscape and Seascape Conservation and Ecological Connectivity through
Cooperative Conservation

1. Purpose and Duration

The National Park Service (NPS) recognizes that landscape- and seascape-scale conservation and protection, enhancement, and restoration of ecological connectivity are critical to fulfilling the NPS mission. This challenge is complex, wide-ranging, and transcends traditional stewardship approaches focused on resources within NPS administrative boundaries. While the NPS must act with partners to cooperatively meet this challenge, we are uniquely positioned to lead and support this effort through our existing partnership programs and due to our responsibility under the NPS Organic Act ([54 USC 100101](#) *et seq.*) to safeguard our Nation's most cherished and iconic natural, cultural, and historic places, and nationally significant rivers and trails.

This Policy Memorandum (Memorandum) affirms NPS commitments and obligations to advance landscape and seascape conservation and to conserve, enhance, and reestablish connectivity of species and ecological processes across land, water, and air through leadership and cooperative conservation with other Federal agencies, Tribes, State and local governments, partners, and other entities.

This Memorandum will remain in effect until amended, superseded, or rescinded by the Director.

2. Background

Embracing landscape and seascape conservation and ecological connectivity is critical to the NPS mission because the resources we protect and the transformative visitor experiences we offer are inextricably linked to the landscapes within which they are situated. For example, the persistence of natural resources in parks depends on the degree to which landscapes and seascapes allow species to move freely and ecological processes to function unimpeded. Similarly, the value, authenticity, and enjoyment experienced by people when immersed in stunning scenery, culturally significant places, and key historic sites depend on the landscape context of these experiences. In addition, the significant relationship between human experience and landscapes, and interconnections across ecosystems can be directly enhanced by conserving

ivers, trails, and other landscape corridors. Units of the National Park System (System), NPS programs, and related areas significantly contribute to landscape and seascape conservation and ecological connectivity in many forms:

- support of migrating animals that require protected seasonal corridors (such as elk, bison, and bighorn sheep) or stop-over sites (such as birds, bats, and butterflies);
- protection of trails, waterways, and cultural spaces that bring partners together to safeguard cherished, meaningful, and ecologically significant landscapes;
- community-based programs such as the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program and National Heritage Areas that enhance locally driven landscape conservation;
- provision of local movements and ecosystem connectivity within parks that can serve as anchors of conservation in broader landscapes; and
- implementation of safe passage for species across roads, trails, and developed areas in and around System units.

System units, and the larger ecosystems within which they occur, face multiple stressors, including habitat loss, fragmentation, invasive species, land use change, and climate change. Collectively, these stressors challenge the traditional NPS view of its mission, preserving relative steady-states and predictable dynamics within System unit boundaries, and require the NPS to plan for stewardship under plausible future conditions that are neither steady nor predictable. Still, the NPS plays a key role to conserve resources and experiences across landscapes and seascapes and to enhance connectivity for many organisms and ecological processes at multiple scales. Toward that end, the NPS must embrace cooperative conservation and work with partners to advance shared goals.

3. Authorities

The NPS has necessary and relevant authority to participate, advance, and lead in cooperative conservation within and beyond System unit boundaries. Statutory obligation to conserve through cooperative efforts is anchored in the:

- NPS Organic Act ([54 USC 100101](#) *et seq.*);
- National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 ([54 USC 300101](#) *et seq.*);
- Cooperative agreements ([54 USC 101702](#)); and
- Good neighbor authority ([16 USC 2113a](#)).

It is further confirmed by the National Trails System Act ([16 USC 1241 – 1251](#)) and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act ([16 USC 1271 – 1287](#)), which provide for specific activities in designated or study corridors and authorities to assist others inside and outside of System units. Landscape and seascape conservation is also confirmed in numerous NPS policy and guidance documents regarding natural and cultural resource stewardship, science, and conservation, including [NPS Management Policies \(2006\)](#) and [Policy Memorandum 12-02, Applying National Park Service Management Policies in the Context of Climate Change](#).

4. Policy

4.1 Planning and Decision Making for Landscape and Seascape Conservation and Connectivity

NPS managers and staff at all levels are expected to collaborate meaningfully across the organization and remove perceived barriers to meet the NPS mission, which includes preserving and protecting ecological processes and managing resources and visitor experiences at landscape and seascape scales. To this end, the NPS will:

- develop and apply collaborative, interdisciplinary approaches to take landscape-scale context and ecological connectivity into account in planning and decision-making;
- integrate planning and design elements into facilities, transportation, visitor use, and recreation planning projects that preserve or enhance landscape connectivity and wildlife-safe passage;
- partner with communications specialists to develop outreach products and strategies to promote the importance of and motivate progress on landscape conservation and ecological connectivity across the NPS;
- employ interdisciplinary approaches that purposefully embrace the interconnectedness of all resources stewarded by the NPS;
- recognize and promote the inherent overlay of natural and cultural landscapes, which rarely end at an administrative boundary; and
- ensure NPS employees have access to and participate in relevant training and enrichment activities that support core competencies and specific skillsets for cooperative conservation at landscape and seascape scales, including understanding applicable authorities, policies, programs, and special designations and how to effectively work with partners in advancing the NPS mission.

4.2 Applying Science, Scholarly Information, and Knowledge to Support Connectivity

NPS managers and staff at all levels are expected to seek and apply existing NPS and externally sourced data that may be relevant to managing at landscape scales and for ecological connectivity. NPS managers should utilize NPS and other scientific capacity to identify and address data and information gaps to effectively protect, enhance, and restore connectivity within the National Park System and on the broader landscape. Such information may include:

- spatial and temporal data on wildlife habitat, detections, and movement patterns;
- physical and human-made features of the environment supporting or inhibiting effective connectivity;
- historical research, cultural landscape scholarship, and relevant and differing perspectives about the significance of landscape and seascape relationships and connectivity to human experiences;
- location and usage patterns of existing and planned transportation, visitation, facilities, and other infrastructure;
- land use and climate change projections relevant to species, habitats, and ecological processes, and the protection of historic resources, cultural landscapes, and visitor-serving infrastructure; and
- connectivity analyses, vulnerability assessments, risk assessments, Resource Stewardship Strategies, or other tools to assist in planning and decision making.

Managers and staff should consider and use a wide variety of relevant and reliable information and facilitate broad data sharing with conservation and preservation partners, consistent with privacy protections for sensitive and proprietary information. The NPS will, to the maximum extent practicable, incorporate Indigenous knowledge and Tribal land management plans into NPS ecological connectivity and landscape-scale planning efforts.

4.3 Leverage and Lead Through Cooperative Conservation

NPS managers and staff at all levels are expected to embrace the significance of the System as an anchor for landscape conservation and ecological connectivity, and to also recognize that, regardless of acreage or unit-specific enabling legislation, the NPS should leverage partnerships and help address the larger challenge of landscape-, regional-, continental-, and global-scale stressors that diminish connectivity. In doing so, the NPS will:

- work with other Federal agencies, Tribal, State, and local governments, and other organizations to pursue data-sharing agreements and prioritize projects to achieve connectivity objectives spanning land management jurisdictions;
- leverage the use of special designations and authorities, both within and outside of System units, including National Heritage Areas, Affiliated Areas, National Natural Landmarks, National Register and National Historic Landmark designations, biosphere regions, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and National Trails System components to galvanize and facilitate cooperative conservation;
- participate in partnership-based workgroups and committees with Tribal, State, and local governments;
- encourage establishment of new conservation partnerships, where needed;
- support partners' applications to fund sources that also benefit NPS resources and landscapes; and
- collaborate with partners to identify and prioritize key parcels for protection, technical support, or restoration to enhance critical landscape conservation and connectivity needs.

5. Implementation Guidance and Tools

Information to assist park managers in implementing the actions identified in this Memorandum are available at this [internal NPS site](#), which will continue to be updated with tools, guidance, and relevant case studies, and from park, regional, and program area subject matter experts and managers. The site includes information about authorities, programs, technical assistance, agreement templates, co-stewardship guidance, the Connected Conservation community of practice, and other resources applicable to the NPS's landscape and seascape conservation, connectivity, and cooperative conservation responsibilities.

6. No Third-Party Enforceability

This Memorandum is intended only to improve the internal management of the NPS and is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or equity by a party against the United States, its departments, agencies, instrumentalities or entities, its officers or employees, or any other person.

-----*End of Policy Memorandum*-----