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Practical Records Management

An Introduction to Records Management in the National Park Service

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Objective - To understand records management principles and activities, including:

- What records management is and why it is important
- How to identify Federal records
- How to maintain records
- Principles of disposition, including using records disposition schedules

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What is records management?

Records management is all the activities related to the creation, maintenance and use and disposition of records.

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Why is records management important?

- We need records to do our work properly
- The public is interested in the National Park Service and what we do
- Laws, regulations and Director's Order #19: Records Management require it

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What are Federal records?
(per 44 U.S.C. 3301)

Federal records are "...all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine-readable materials...made or received by an agency... preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency... as evidence of the organization, function, policies...."

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Keys to Defining Federal Records

- First, records are created *or* received;
- Second, records serve as documentation of some agency activity; and
- Finally, records are not just paper – they take a variety of forms and can be found in all media

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To Help Determine if an Item is a Record, Ask...

- Does it document NPS policies, activities or other transactions?
- Was the creator or recipient acting in an official capacity during creation or receipt of the item?
- Is the subject matter related to the NPS?
- Was it made available to others?

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Other Documentation

- *Non-record materials*: government-owned materials that do not meet the definition of a Federal record (copies, library materials...).
- *Personal papers*: private materials not related to work or used to do work.

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Records, Non-records or Personal Papers?

Read through each example below and determine if it is a record, non-record or personal paper.

1. A flyer from Yellowstone NP warning visitors not to approach the buffalo.
2. Individual personnel folders maintained by your personnel office.
3. Vendor catalogs and trade journals.
4. "As-built" plans for the renovation of your park's visitor center.
5. Office reading files.
6. Copies of directives maintained by various offices.
7. A copy of a letter from your boss to a travel agency making arrangements for his vacation in the Everglades.
8. An electronic mail message distributing a recent directive.
9. Requests from citizens for information about jobs with the NPS.
10. A tape containing data collected during a project evaluating the impact of hikers on trails in Grand Canyon NP.

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Maintaining Active Records

- Manage *series*, not individual items
- Understand and use the NPS system of *file codes*
- Establish a useable *filing system*
- Develop good *filing practices*

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The Idea of the Series

A series is a group of records that have a relationship arising from their creation, receipt or use.

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Series Include...

- Records relating to a particular subject or function (such as contracts)
- Documentation of a specific activity (project files for the building of a road)
- Records of a particular physical type (maps and photographs, for example)

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Managing Series of Records...

- Makes records management doable
- Ensures that similar and related records are all treated in the same manner

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The NPS System of File Codes

The NPS file codes are alphanumeric designations for each series of records, ranging from A14 to Y42.

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Understanding the File Codes

- Each file code begins with a primary key letter (A = Administration, C = Concessions...)
- Following is a secondary (even) number (14, 18, 20...)
- Next is a tertiary (odd) number (15, 17, 19...)

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An Example and Explanation

An item coded *H2621* = History (H), Reports and Related Correspondence(26), Annual (21), or annual reports created or collected by the historian's office.

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How Do We Know What File Code to Use?

- A knowledgeable person has already put a file code on the item
- The record is obviously part of an existing series of records
- The creator or recipient must assign the appropriate file code

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Assigning File Codes to Records

- Choose a file code because of the use or purpose of the record
- Select one related to the content of the item
- Assign file codes based on both

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Assigning a File Code Based on Use or Purpose

- You receive a letter asking for information
- Your response is brief because the information is readily available
- This does not require the signature of a manager (such as the superintendent)
- The appropriate file code is K14 - Information Requests

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Assigning a File Code Based on Content

- You receive a letter asking for information
- Your response requires research or an explanation of a policy or a decision
- The response requires the signature of a manager (such as the superintendent)
- The appropriate file code identifies a program area or activity

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Good Filing Practices

- Records should be filed daily
- Use sorters to organize records prior to filing
- Check records first – do they have a file code? Are they complete?
- Remove fasteners such as paper clips and rubber bands – staple items if needed

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More Good Filing Practices

- Put records in folders
- Use the appropriate size folder for the records
- Identify the contents of the folder, including the file code, file name, date and disposition instructions
- Maintain the files with care!

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Records Disposition

- The final stage of the life cycle of records
- Done when records are no longer needed for current agency business
- Includes destruction of records and transfer to a storage facility such as a records center or an archives

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The Records Disposition Schedule

- Current schedule is NPS-19, Appendix B (Rev. 5-03)
- Provides directions for what to do with NPS records
- *Records may not be destroyed or transferred without at item in this schedule!*

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Records Disposition Schedule Issues

- The records disposition schedule was revised in 2003, but the approved authorities date from the late 1980s
- Many records series are now identified as *resource management records* to protect them
- New records may not be included in it

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The Value of Records

- *Temporary* records are destroyed after a specified period of time
- *Permanent* records are needed to manage our resources or to document our work and are kept and maintained forever
- NPS records are designated as temporary or permanent in the records disposition schedule

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Transferring Records

- Inactive records may be transferred to storage to reduce the cost and burden of maintaining them in the office
- They may go to a Federal Records Center (FRC), a park archives or to the custody of the National Archives

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Transferring Records to a FRC

- Done for both temporary and permanent records
- Records are still NPS records and are available when needed
- The FRC manages records per NPS instructions
- Transfers are made with the SF135 (Records Transmittal and Receipt)

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Tips on Managing Electronic Records

- Print and file textual documents
- Delete unneeded documents, especially nonrecord materials
- Organize and label records
- Handle them with care!
- Remember to migrate files as needed

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Tips on Managing Audiovisual Records

- Maintain audiovisual records under controlled environmental conditions
- Use archival quality containers (boxes, envelopes)
- Organize and identify the records
- Be careful when handling these records and provide reference copies when possible

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Final Thoughts on Records Management in the NPS

- The importance of what the NPS does demands that we take excellent care of our records
- It needs to be part of our other business processes
- Everyone is responsible for doing records management
- If you are unsure of what to do, ask for help!
