

Criteria for Parklands



Throughout the Nation, people are working to conserve natural resources, protect historic sites, and to provide recreational opportunities for a growing population. Many communities also are looking for ways to combine conservation with efforts to attract visitors who will help support the local economy. The National Park Service is responsible for carefully screening proposals for new park units to assure that only the most outstanding resources are added to the National Park System. Regardless of economic

considerations or other factors, a new national park area must meet criteria for national significance, suitability and feasibility. Various other management options are also weighed. For those with proposals for consideration, this brochure explains the criteria applied by the National Park Service in evaluating new park proposals, outlines the study process, and lists some of the other ways to recognize and protect important resources outside of the National Park System.

Qualifications

How are national parks created? What qualities make an area eligible to be a national monument, historic site, recreation area, or other unit of the National Park System? These questions are frequently asked by people throughout the country. Some people think a scenic part of their community deserves to be a national park. Others want national recognition for their favorite historic house or geological formation. These sites may deserve to be protected, but how do we decide if action should be taken at the state or local level instead of by the federal government?

The National Park Service has established criteria for national significance, suitability, feasibility, and management alternatives that help answer these questions. This folder presents the criteria and the study process established in the National Park Service's Management Policies. People with suggestions for new parks can use these criteria as a yardstick to see if their proposals are likely to merit further consideration.

Units of the National Park System are managed under mandates differing from those guiding many other federal, state, and local agencies. The National Park Service is responsible for managing areas to provide for public enjoyment in such a way that will leave resources "unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." Since 1872 the National Park System has grown to include more than 350 areas. However, the areas managed by the National Park Service are a small part of the broader system for protecting important places. Addition to the National Park System is only one of many alternatives, and the National Park Service also operates several programs that help others preserve natural, cultural, and recreational areas outside of the System.

The System continues to evolve, reflecting the progression of history, new understandings of natural systems, and changes in patterns of recreation. Proposals for additions to the National Park System may come from the public, state and local officials, Indian tribes, members of Congress, or the National Park Service. To be eligible for favorable consideration as a unit of the National Park System, an area must possess nationally significant natural, cultural, or recreational resources; be a suitable and feasible addition to the System; and require direct NPS management instead of protection by some other governmental agency or by the private sector.

National Significance

A proposed unit will be considered nationally significant if it meets all four of the following standards.

- It is an outstanding example of a particular type of resource.
- It possesses exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the natural or cultural themes of our Nation's heritage.
- It offers superlative opportunities for recreation, for public use and enjoyment, or for scientific study.
- It retains a high degree of integrity as a true, accurate, and relatively unspoiled example of the resource.

Resource Evaluation The following examples of natural, cultural, and recreational areas are considered in evaluating the significance of a proposal for addition to the National Park System.

Natural Area examples may include:

- an outstanding site that illustrates the characteristics of a landform or biotic area that is still widespread
- a rare remnant natural landscape or biotic area of a type that was once widespread but is now vanishing due to human settlement and development
- a landform or biotic area that has always been extremely uncommon in the region or Nation
- a site that possesses exceptional diversity of ecological components (species, communities, or habitats) or geological features (landforms, observable manifestations of geologic processes)
- a site that contains biotic species or communities whose natural distribution at that location makes them unusual (for example, a relatively large population at the limit of its range or an isolated population)
- a site that harbors a concentrated population of a rare plant or animal species, particularly one officially recognized as threatened or endangered
- a critical refuge that is necessary for the continued survival of a species
- a site that contains rare or unusually abundant fossil deposits
- an area that has outstanding scenic qualities such as dramatic topographic features, unusual contrasts in landforms or vegetation, spectacular vistas, or other special landscape features
- a site that is an invaluable ecological or geological benchmark due to an extensive and long-term record of research and scientific discovery.

Cultural Areas may be districts, sites, structures, or objects that possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting our heritage and that possess a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Specific examples include:

- a resource that is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to and are identified with, or that outstandingly represent the broad national patterns of United States history and from which an understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained
 - a resource that is importantly associated with the lives of persons nationally significant in the history of the United States
 - a resource that represents some great idea or ideal of the American people
 - a resource that embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, exceptionally valuable for study of a period, style, or method of construction, or represents a significant, distinctive, and exceptional entity whose components may lack individual distinction
 - a resource that is composed of integral parts of the environment not sufficiently significant by reason of historical association or artistic merit to warrant individual recognition but collectively composes an entity of exceptional historical or artistic significance, or outstandingly commemorates or illustrates a way of life or culture
 - a resource that has yielded or may be likely to yield information of major scientific importance by revealing new cultures, or by shedding light upon periods of occupation over large areas of the United States.
- Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, and reconstructed historic buildings and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years are not considered to be appropriate as additions to the National Park System unless they have transcendent importance, unless they possess inherent architectural or artistic significance, or unless no other site associated with that theme remains.

Recreational Area examples include:

- a natural or cultural feature that provides a special setting for a variety of recreational activities different from those available at the local or regional level
- a spacious area that is located near a major population center with the potential to provide exceptional recreational opportunities and to serve visitors from around the Nation rather than solely from the immediate vicinity
- an area that protects a unique recreation resource that is scarce and disappearing in a multi-state region such as an outstanding recreational river, a unique maritime environment or coastline, or a unique scenic area
- a resource that is a unique combination of natural, cultural, and recreational features that collectively offer outstanding opportunities for public use and enjoyment even though each feature might not individually be considered nationally significant.

Suitability and Feasibility

An area that is nationally significant also must meet criteria for suitability and feasibility to qualify as a potential addition to the National Park System. To be **suitable** for inclusion in the System an area must represent a natural or cultural theme or type of recreational resource that is not already adequately represented in the National Park System or is not comparably represented and protected for public enjoyment by another land-managing entity. Adequacy of representation is determined on a case-by-case basis by comparing the proposed area to other units in the National Park System for differences or similarities in the character, quality, quantity, or combination of resources, and opportunities for public enjoyment.

To be **feasible** as a new unit of the National Park System an area's natural systems and/or historic settings must be of sufficient size and appropriate configuration to ensure long-term protection of the resources and to accommodate public use. It must have potential for efficient administration at a reasonable cost. Important feasibility factors include landownership, acquisition costs, access, threats to the resource, and staff or development requirements.

Management Options

Alternatives to National Park Service management might adequately protect resources even if they are significant, suitable, and feasible additions to the System. Studies of potential new park units evaluate management alternatives that may include continued management by state or local governments, Indian tribes, the private sector, or other federal agencies; technical or financial assistance from established programs or special projects; management by others as a designated national natural landmark, a national historic landmark, a national wild and scenic river, a national trail, a biosphere reserve, a state or local park, or some other specially designated and protected area; or cooperative management between the National Park Service and other entities. Alternatives involving other federal agencies include designation of federal lands as wilderness, areas of critical environmental concern, national conservation areas, national recreation areas, marine or estuarine sanctuaries, and national wildlife refuges. Additions to the National Park System will not usually be recommended if another arrangement can provide adequate protection and opportunity for public enjoyment.

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Areas are usually added to the National Park System by an act of Congress. However, before Congress decides about creating a new park it needs information about the quality of the resource and whether it meets established criteria. The National Park Service answers such questions by conducting studies that gather basic data about an area to determine its level of significance. If an area meets the standards of national significance, additional information is gathered about its suitability and feasibility as a park unit and

alternatives for management and protection. If an area does not meet the standards of national significance, the National Park Service will suggest other appropriate state, local, or private actions. The following summary outlines basic steps in the study process, including opportunities for public involvement, the role of Congress in setting park boundaries and deciding what uses will be allowed in a new park, and other special designations that may be available for resources of state, local, or national significance.

Procedures

Study Process

Criteria for parklands are applied by the professional staff of the National Park Service. The first step is usually a reconnaissance survey to collect basic information about a proposal and assess the resource's significance. If the area appears to have some potential as a unit of the National Park System, a detailed study of management options will be conducted.

The National Park Service has broad authority to conduct studies of potential parks, but it does not always have funds available to collect and analyze data or apply the criteria. In some cases a brief assessment of resources may be possible within available programs, but a thorough study will usually require funding from Congress or private sources.

Studies are conducted in consultation with other interested federal, state, and local agencies, Indian tribes, and the public. The format for public involvement is determined by the study team considering the type of resource and level of interest in the proposal. The public may be invited to participate through informal contacts, workshops, meetings, and opportunities to review draft documents.

Boundaries Studies of potential new park units discuss various boundary configurations. Selection of a park boundary is often a compromise between the ideal and what is practical considering costs and other factors. The National Park Service also considers the need for boundary adjustments as part of the planning process for existing units of the National Park System.

Boundary studies are similar to studies of potential new parks but apply somewhat different criteria. Boundary revisions may be recommended to include significant features or opportunities for public enjoyment related to the purposes of the park, to address operational and management issues such as access and boundary identification along topographic or natural features or roads, or to protect park resources critical to the park's purposes. Boundary studies discuss management options and whether lands will be feasible to administer considering size, configuration, ownership, costs, and other factors.

Authorizations Congress decides if an area should be added to the National Park System or if some other action might be appropriate. Congressional committees usually hold hearings on proposed additions to the System and ask the Secretary of the Interior for recommendations. Studies by the National Park Service provide information to help the Secretary develop a position and

to help Congress decide what action to take. Study reports prepared by the National Park Service, however, present information about the resources and do not normally contain recommendations. Legislation authorizing a new area will explain the purpose of the area and outline any specific directions for additional planning, land acquisition, management, and operations.

Congress has used more than 20 different designations in adding areas to the National Park System. These titles are usually descriptive: seashore, lakeshore, historic site, battlefield, and recreation area, for example. The designations have not always been used consistently, but they reflect certain precedents that have been followed by Congress. The title of national park has traditionally been reserved for the most spectacular natural areas with a wide variety of features. Hunting, mining, and other consumptive uses such as grazing are generally prohibited in national parks. National monuments are usually smaller areas established primarily to protect historic, scientific, or natural features containing fewer diverse resources or attractions than national parks. Legislation authorizing national preserves, recreation areas, seashores, and lakeshores sometimes allows for a wider range of activities such as oil and gas development, grazing, and hunting subject to certain limits. Despite these differences, all units of the National Park System are managed so as to "leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

Assistance and Evaluation

Besides running the National Park System, the National Park Service also manages or participates in several programs that offer recognition or assistance for areas that do not become units of the System. Natural, cultural, and recreational resources that are nationally significant may be eligible for special titles or designations while they continue to be managed by states, local governments, other federal agencies, or private owners. Resources of state or local significance also may benefit from technical or financial assistance programs. Some titles, distinctions, and funding sources require action by Congress while others can be provided without site-specific legislation.

Cultural resources of state, local, or national significance may be listed by the National Park Service in the *National Register of Historic Places* as being worthy of preservation and special consideration in planning for federal projects. Nationally significant places may be designated national natural landmarks or national historic landmarks by the Secretary of the Interior. Congress may also authorize financial or technical assistance for nationally significant areas that are affiliated with the National Park System but remain under private, state, or local jurisdiction subject to National Park Service oversight.

Resources with international importance may be designated as a world heritage site or biosphere reserve. Rivers may be designated by Congress or the Secretary of the Interior as components of the wild and scenic rivers system. Trails on federal, state, local or private lands may be designated as national recreation trails by the Secretary of the Interior. Trails meeting standards for scenic and historic quality may be designated by Congress as national scenic trails or national historic trails.

State and local governments may apply for grants through the National Park Service to support historic preservation and acquisition or development of recreational facilities when funds are available.

The National Park Service can provide technical assistance to state and local governments in conservation of rivers, trails, natural areas, and cultural resources. Other partnerships may be established involving recognition, technical assistance, and coordination with the National Park Service for special resources and programs that are not necessarily of national significance.

Further Information

Questions about the criteria and the study process not answered by this brochure should be directed to:

Division of Park Planning and Special Studies
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127.

Inquiries about specific sites or proposals should be directed to the appropriate National Park Service regional office:

Alaska Region
National Park Service
2525 Gambell Street
Anchorage, AK 99503
ALASKA

Mid-Atlantic Region
National Park Service
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106
DELAWARE, MARYLAND, PENNSYLVANIA, VIRGINIA, and WEST VIRGINIA

Midwest Region
National Park Service
1709 Jackson Street
Omaha, NE 68102
ILLINOIS, INDIANA, IOWA, KANSAS, MICHIGAN, MINNESOTA, MISSOURI, NEBRASKA, OHIO, and WISCONSIN

National Capital Region
National Park Service
1100 Ohio Drive, SW
Washington, DC 20242

METROPOLITAN AREA of WASHINGTON, D.C., with some units in MARYLAND, VIRGINIA, and WEST VIRGINIA

North Atlantic Region
National Park Service

15 State Street
Boston, MA 02109
CONNECTICUT, MAINE, MASSACHUSETTS, NEW HAMPSHIRE, NEW JERSEY, NEW YORK, RHODE ISLAND, and VERMONT

Pacific Northwest Region

National Park Service
83 South King Street
Suite 212
Seattle, WA 98104
IDAHO, OREGON, and WASHINGTON

Rocky Mountain Region

National Park Service
12795 West Alameda Parkway
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, CO 80225
COLORADO, MONTANA, NORTH DAKOTA, SOUTH DAKOTA, UTAH, and WYOMING

Southeast Region

National Park Service
75 Spring Street, SW
Atlanta, GA 30303
ALABAMA, FLORIDA, GEORGIA, KENTUCKY, MISSISSIPPI, NORTH CAROLINA, PUERTO RICO, SOUTH CAROLINA, TENNESSEE, and the VIRGIN ISLANDS

Southwest Region

National Park Service
P.O. Box 728
Santa Fe, NM 87504
ARIZONA (northeast corner), ARKANSAS, LOUISIANA, NEW MEXICO, OKLAHOMA, and TEXAS

Western Region

National Park Service
450 Golden Gate Avenue
Box 36063
San Francisco, CA 94102
ARIZONA (all but northeast corner), CALIFORNIA, HAWAII, and NEVADA