

Briefing Statement for Northeast Region Natural Resource Managers

Subject: Park Resource Stewardship Plan Policy (Draft Director's Order 2.1)

Date: March 10, 2005

Background: Since 1988 parks have been required to prepare and maintain a *Resource Management Plan* (RMP) detailing how natural and cultural resources would be managed. During the ensuing years, first in 1998 with the issuance of Director's Order 2, followed by its subsequent inclusion in the 2001 *NPS Management Policies*, the overall NPS planning process underwent significant change. Under the current planning process a large gap generally exists between the broad requirements contained in a park's *General Management Plan* (GMP) and the information available to guide decision-making during park strategic planning. In marked contrast with the generally one to two decade perspective of "management objectives" in earlier GMPs, a key element of the changes to park planning since 1997 is the focus of the GMP on establishing the very long-term "desired conditions" of the park's resources and visitor experience.

Proposal: Director's Order 2.1 revises current NPS policy concerning park *Resource Management Plans* (RMPs) to address the gap between GMPs and the 5-year decisions made during park strategic planning. Specifically, existing RMPs would be retired as they are superseded by a new type of plan, a *Resource Stewardship Plan* (RSP). The focus of the RSP would be to provide park managers with peer-reviewed science- and scholarship-based comprehensive strategies designed to achieve and/or maintain desired resource conditions. .

The 10-to-20 year strategies developed and documented in the RSP provide a basis for determining the park's long-term needs for changes in base budget allocations, securing nonrecurring funds outside of park base, and staffing capabilities. While these strategies would serve as a basis for developing and revising park 5-year strategic plans, their longer time frame is intended to support consistency spanning multiple strategic planning cycles; a feature especially important where attaining a desired resource condition requires more than five years to be realized.

The detailed implementation information (i.e., project statements) previously included in RMPs would not be an aspect of the new RSP. Instead the comprehensive strategies in the RSP would provide the basis for the separate preparation of detailed project and base funding needs through the appropriate information system tools (e.g., PMIS, OFS, FMSS, etc.).

Involvement: The current internal Draft Director's Order 2.1 integrates review comments received in late 2003 from both the Natural Resource Advisory Group (NRAG) and the Management Council for Cultural Resources Stewardship and Partnership (McCRSP), together with those resulting from a Spring 2004 60-day NLC (Servicewide) review and a Winter 2004-2005 interdisciplinary natural resource and cultural resource working group. The draft DO is awaiting a briefing of the WASO Associate Directors of Natural Resource Stewardship and Science and Cultural Resources prior to being released for public comment. This briefing will recommend an additional, relatively short turnaround regional review in light of revisions made in response to previous comments prior to initiating the public review.

Timeline to Approval of DO 2-1: Based on the remaining review(s), especially the time frame routinely required to initiate the public comment period, the earliest date DO 2-1 might be approved by the Director would be in the 1st quarter of FY 2006.

Resource Stewardship Plan Key Elements:

- Adopts the desired resource conditions from the park's GMP.
- Defines the park's desired resource conditions and resource condition-dependent desired visitor experiences in terms of objective, measurable values representing their achievement (values based on the best available science and scholarship).
- Summarizes current knowledge of the park's resources and identifies areas where information is insufficient (also describes strategies for its acquisition).
- Assesses the current condition of park resources in comparison with their desired resource conditions (using the previously developed measurable values for each).
- Reports trends in resource conditions based on available monitoring information.
- Reports influences, both beneficial and detrimental, affecting or with the reasonable potential to affect resource conditions.
- Analyzes management issues affecting the achievement and maintenance of desired resource conditions.
- Documents long-term (10-to-20 year) peer-reviewed science- and scholarship-based comprehensive resource stewardship strategies designed to achieve and maintain the park's desired resource conditions.
- Assesses the effectiveness of previous and current resource management actions in achieving or maintaining the park's desired future resource conditions and describes their implications for the comprehensive strategies.

Requirement for Parks to Complete Resource Stewardship Plans:

- Parks possessing an approved GMP containing desired conditions consistent with current NPS Park Planning Program Standards would be required to have an approved RSP in place within four years of the date of DO 2-1. Parks possessing GMPs that do not meet this standard may develop an RSP during this timeframe at their option.

Related Items:

- *A Resource Stewardship Planning Handbook* (Level 3 guidance) will be prepared for release as near the approval date of DO 2-1 as practical. This handbook will benefit from the experiences gained through the next bulleted item.
- Pilot RSPs are being planned for initiation in several parks beginning in Spring 2005 to apply and revise/refine the resource stewardship planning process.

