

RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLANS¹

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In order to logically talk about a subject as varied and controversial as Resources Management Plans, it is first necessary to make a few statements that we all can agree upon and that will provide a basis for discussion. First, it is a simple truth that the National Park Service has grown from a relatively insignificant Federal agency to a major land-managing organization. Second, the multidisciplinary activities of managing a National Park area have had comparable acceleration. Third, the Service has made some errors in managing the resources in the past. Fourth, the most logical route to ecologically sound management of the resources includes planning. And fifth, even the very best plan that is placed on a shelf to gather dust is worthless.

These comments suggest that resources management activities within a national park must be well thought out and documented, and when a decision on the best management direction becomes unsure or unknown, research probably is a necessary step in the decision process.

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I imagine that it was with those thoughts in mind that the initial idea of Resources Management Plans was formulated. The functions of Resource Management planning initially were the responsibilities of the Washington Office. Initial guidelines were developed in 1965 and slightly revised guidelines were incorporated in the 1968 Natural Resources Management Handbook. The introductory section of that Handbook includes the following:

"A Resources Management Plan is a documented course of action for achieving or maintaining a given or desired resource condition in accordance with the purpose of the area concerned. Management may involve active manipulation of resources or their protection from modification or external influences."

"In order to accomplish the purpose of any area and to fulfill the mission of the Service in that area, the course of action for the management of natural resources must be documented and implemented on the basis of the best available information. A resources management plan must provide continuity in reaching long-range objectives, and must include a program of action for reaching these objectives. The Resources Management Plan should "flow" from the master plan, based on an ecological analysis of the natural resources and management objectives established for these resources. Accomplishment of the area purpose and reaching area objectives with regard to the resources and their use is the objective of the Resources Management Plan."

The current Management Policies state:

"The Resources Management Plan provides a course of action, based on Service policy and law, for the continuous protection, management, and maintenance of park resources to achieve park purpose and objectives, and to appropriately regulate the effect of park use of these resources."

"Separate sections will be prepared for natural and historic zones. The plan will be so devised that actions and more refined work plans may flow from it. The plan must be based on adequate knowledge of the resources. However, if such knowledge is absent, it must place necessary research activities in priority for early accomplishment and specify interim management guidelines until the research is completed."

Let me reread that last sentence because it seems to me that a good many of our problems with Resources Management Plans start right there.

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I have found no real argument against the inclusion of research needs and priorities. In most cases, management welcomes the opportunity to address the research needs. But, too many of our Resources Management Plans are

developed as Research Plans only and tend to ignore the management actions underway or required. Too many of the plans that I have reviewed do not state what the management actions are that will be accomplished during the source of necessary research. It is likely that most pre-research management actions will require a revision upon completion of the research, and the new management strategy must be documented within a revised RMP.

The first plans prepared in the 1960s followed the initial guidelines and in a sense, set a general format for all of those that followed. The contents of those plans was simple. It included:

- I. Area Purpose - why the area was included in the NPS
- II. Management Objectives - what is management trying to accomplish
- III. Management Program - the action management proposes to carry out
- IV. Research - research needs of the area for resources management
- V. Appendix - supporting information

It was a fairly concise and workable outline, although many areas felt it also was necessary to include an Environmental Overview section that described the park's total physical environment. That section was often the most extensive portion of the plan.

The Appendices included constraint documents, such as the enabling legislation and policy, specific agreements, lists of known resources, and a variety of management action plans that we call Implementation Plans, today.

Let me read from Saguaro National Monument's Resources Management Plan (approved in 1968). The list of management plans include: "Saguaro cactus survival," "grazing and soil conservation," "mining," "desert use," "fire plan (natural and prescribed burning)," "picnic use," "archeological sites," "road design," "exotic plants," "rare, endangered and extirpated species," "hazardous and exotic animal control," "backcountry visitor use," "regional planning," and "suburban encroachment."

Only a handful of Resources Management Plans were completed in the 1960s. In 1970, the Resources Management Planning function was transferred to the Office of Natural Science Studies, and in the fall of 1971 the responsibilities for plan coordination was deligated to the Regional Offices. This change did provide coordination closer to the field areas, but it also permitted each Region to devise their own guidelines. The added requirement of following NEPA procedure added a new dimension that had not been included in earlier plans. The Service's initial interpretation of NEPA required Resources Management Planners to at least triple their time and effort on each plan.

Criteria for Natural Resources Management Plans had been developed in 1971. And to some degree these criteria did help to stabilize the Resources Management Planning efforts. All of the Regions utilized those criteria in developing their own guidelines. Excerpts include:

1. THE PLAN MUST BE RELEVANT TO THE AREA'S NEEDS.

That is, the plan should not be a catalogue of things that would be nice to do, if unlimited time and money were made available; rather, it should address itself to programs that are actually underway, or that must and will be implemented in the near future, to meet specific objectives of the park.

2. THE AREA MANAGER MUST IDENTIFY WITH THE PLAN.

To be effective, the Resources Management Plan is the Superintendent's proposed course of action. To achieve this end, the Superintendent and his staff must have combined personal involvement in the preparation of the plan, as well as in its implementation.

3. GOALS MUST BE OBTAINABLE, AND STATED IN QUANTITATIVE TERMS.

Individual projects should be stated in terms of what the park manager can reasonably expect to achieve within the constraints of technical know how, funds, manpower, and a given time-frame. What is to be done, or what resources are to be manipulated by the proposed action should be expressed whenever possible in quantitative units, e.g., acres of grassland to be treated by prescribed burning; number and species of fingerling fish to be planted in x-bodies of water, etc. Anticipated results of the proposed action should be spelled out in measurable units to facilitate the evaluation of goal attainment.

4. GOALS AND METHODS OF ATTAINMENT MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH AREA OBJECTIVES.

The area Master Plan as well as Service and Departmental policies and standards should be considered in the development of the plan. It must be carefully tailored to meet both the specific situation and approved Management Objectives of the area.

5. PLANS MUST BE FLEXIBLE.

All actions must be continually monitored, and programs should be modified to reflect new knowledge as it becomes available, or to adjust management practices that are either not achieving the desired results or are doing so only at the expense to the integrity of the environments or the natural resources. That is, we must endeavor to recognize our mistakes and take corrective action at the earliest possible time. Projects can no longer be justified on the grounds that "we have always done it that way."

6. PLAN ELEMENTS (PROJECTS) MUST BE COORDINATED WITH OTHER PARK ACTIVITIES.

Program actions should follow in a logical order. For instance, if a project depends on the acquisition of new research data, sufficient lead time should be specified to complete the research prior to implementing other aspects of the project. Possible conflicts between projects should be avoided through sound planning. This is largely a matter of good communications - - letting the other fellow know what, when, where, how and why an action is to be carried out, so that programs may be designed in harmony.

7. FUNDS, MANPOWER AND TIME MUST BE PROGRAMMED.

The Era when program plans were acceptable that contained the wistful phase, " - - when funds are made available," is past. Plans, today, must be statements of how the area manager proposes to utilize his available time, funds and manpower, and the plans are the basis for justifying additional funds and manpower as necessary. Therefore, it is imperative the plans have clear statements of needs (money, people, supplies, etc.) that will be required to do the job. Of equal, if not greater importance is the necessity to reflect proposed projects in the park's budget request and operating program. The approved Resources Management Plan will supplement and support requests for funds, but it will not replace normal budgetary procedures, i.e., the plan may replace the RSP but not the 10-238. A well written plan will be extremely helpful not only in developing a realistic list of project priorities, but in identifying management needs before they become emergencies.

8. PLANS MUST BE ECOLOGICALLY SOUND.

Where feasible, and without diminishing the value of the park for human use, corrective actions should be directed toward elimination of the cause of ecological problems, rather than limited to treating the symptoms of those problems. The latter approach may be the only alternative in some cases, but it is a tread-mill that should be avoided if possible.

A new direction of Resources Management Planning throughout the Service was started in late 1972. One year later 17 plans were completed and approved.

In a recent (August 1977) canvass of the nine Regional Offices I found that a total of 94 plans had been completed and received approval. Although this figure shows that considerable progress has been made, still less than one-third of our park's have Resources Management Plans.

In examining plans from seven of the Regions (two Regions have no approved plans), I found that the procedure for developing the plans varies remarkably. Some Regions utilize a team approach of key park and Regional Office personnel. Some Regions send a team of specialists to the park to assist in developing the plan for the area. Other Regions leave the responsibility totally to the park area and provide assistance upon request only.

Plan formats run the gamut from being exceptionally detailed and reading like a comprehensive natural history handbook and natural science research plan to being exceptionally short documents of a few pages only and of minimal value.

I found only two parts of Resources Management Plans included by all seven Regions; the Table of Contents and the Project Statements. However, the following parts were included in most of the Regional formats:

- I. Cover Sheet - this is the title page that usually carries the recommending signature of the area Superintendent and the approval signature of the Regional Director.

II. Table of Contents

III. Management Program - this is the guts of the plan that includes project statements or statement of conditions, and actions underway or to be taken.

IV. Programming Sheet - This part provides programming information to implement the actions discussed in the management program. Most Programming Sheets are established in five year increments.

V. Appendix - this section varies considerably.

It is interesting to examine the multitude of additional materials that are incorporated into the numerous plans. Inclusions not listed above are: Plan Team Members, Abstract, Statement for Management, Land Classification, Annotated Management Constraints, Park Purpose, Management Objectives, Relations to Other Programs and Plans, Methodology and Procedures for Study Problem and Resource Management Activity Recognition, Environmental Review, Negative Declarations, Blanket EIS, Research Projects Not Listed on Program Project Statements, List of Natural Resources Projects, Natural Science Areas, and Monitoring of Results.

The Appendices contain almost as wild an assortment of items including: Constraint Documents, Related Documents, Completed Research, Collections and Locations, Information Base Checklist, Bibliography, Summary of Historic Survey, Summary of Ruins Maintenance, Ruins Maintenance Descriptions, Activity Standards, Implementation Plans, 10-238S, RSP's, and Annual Review, Changes and Dates Statement.

Some areas prepare three separate Resource Management Plan parts: the Environmental Assessment, the Management Program, and a Summary of the Resources Management Program. Some areas totally ignore NEPA requirements. And some Regions use the concept of an environmental overview or negative declaration to satisfy the requirement.

In general, National Park Service Resources Management Plans look like a plan put together by a committee, kind of a three-legged, two-headed camel.

Just what is required in a plan? What is excess? And how is a plan best developed?

Let's take another look at the reason for Resources Management Planning. As I see it, the purpose of a plan is to document the general National Park Service policy for resources management into a course of action for achieving or maintaining desired resource conditions.

Then, for whom is the plan intended? Principally for the park manager and his staff. It may also provide information for other Park Service offices, and the general public as needed.

Therefore, the plan requirements must: (1) be comprehensive but brief so that it can readily be reviewed and kept current, (2) include statements of the activity or problem recognition based upon area Management Objectives, (3) include what management and/or research action is underway or contemplated for each activity, (4) provide programming guidelines and priorities, and (5) satisfy NEPA requirements.

Let me quantify some of these requirements. If the Resources Management Plan is to be one part of the comprehensive General Management Plan, it requires little introduction and supporting documentation. The GMP (the mother document) already includes Area Purpose, Management Objectives, maps, description of the area resources, developments, land uses, environmental and socioeconomic constraints, and identification of management zones. The Resources Management Plan is only responsible for documenting the area's resource management activities and, when additional information is required, to make a management decision, the research required, and providing information supporting the related budgetary functions.

And what about NEPA? As I see it, one of the major influences in designing Resources Management Plans has been the requirement to follow NEPA procedures. The Western Region has gone so far as to essentially write two separate documents: one as an assessment and one as the action plan. Other regions, including the Southwest, have included an environmental review statement in each plan that states that it is the determination of the Regional Director that none of the actions within are controversial or significantly effect the environment, and all such actions will be further documented in an Implementation Plan that will be prepared at a later date; each Implementation Plan initially will be prepared as an environmental assessment and given full public review.

Let me use the burro management program for Bandelier National Monument as an example. One of Bandelier's Resources Management Plan Project Statements addressed the initial problem of the impact of burros upon

the area's natural and cultural resources. It states that the necessary action includes basic research to document the burro's impact upon the resources, and discusses the various kinds of studies required. It also states that a separate burro management plan will be prepared as an Implementation Plan upon completion of the data gathering phase and prior to taking any management action, and that document will follow NEPA procedure.

Bandelier's initial Resources Management Plan was completed in the spring of 1974. Research on burro impacts continued through 1976. By August 1976, a burro management assessment was prepared that included several alternative courses of action, from doing nothing to complete elimination of the burros. That assessment was presented as Bandelier's Burro Management Plan at a public workshop in December. The environmental review was prepared in February 1977, and Initial action of burro reduction was started in July 1977. That was included as an Implementation Plan (satellite document) in Bandelier's Resources Management Plan.

Although this just described process has been a successful one for us in the Southwest Region, comprehensive environmental assessments are probably preferred in the few cases when a park has fully developed all of its resources management programs, and they can all be documented within a comprehensive plan. This, however, is a very rare occurrence.

I am sure that some field areas that are working long and hard hours in plan preparations believe that the guidelines handed down from the Regional hierarchy are sacred. But as some past wiseman once stated "come let's reason together."

We have heard the discussion on the general format for the General Management Plan, and the Resources Management Plan will continue to be part of that process. Quoting from NPS-2, "The Natural Resources Management component establishes the principal strategies that will be continued, phased out, modified, or initiated for the purpose of perpetuating natural resources and processes. Primary emphasis is on future management of the natural zone and each of its included subzones." In other words, the Resources Management Plan must document all of an area's manipulation of the park resources, and any process that is utilized to influence the manipulation of park resources.

Although there is sufficient justification for the inclusion of the Statement for Management, or at least the Management Objectives, in plans prepared unrelated to imminent GMP's, once the plan becomes an actual part of the General Management Plan, this permits us to trim the Resources Management Plan to the essential ingredients.

And what is that? In my opinion, it must include:

1. Cover Sheet that identifies the plan and also carries the signatures of the recommending officer and approving officer.

- II. A Table of Contents is a must.
- III. I suggest that an Introduction is necessary to permit some point of departure from the other parts of the GMP. This statement should explain the purpose of the plan and its status as an ever-changing section of the GMP.
- IV. The Resources Management Program must contain all of the management and research actions. It may include two parts, for natural and cultural resources. This section will undoubtedly vary in length, detail and content. The essential portion of this section must include: (1) Problem Statements or Statements of Condition, (2) Actions required to resolve the problems or conditions, and (3) descriptions of the Research when required.
- V. Programming Sheets, for maintaining of operations and research absolutely necessary. These multi-year programming sheets are essential in setting priorities for long-range planning.
- VI. Overview or negative declaration.
- VII. Appendix. I propose that this section includes at least two things, Information Base Checklist and the Implementation Plans. The Information Base Checklist should be an up-to-date listing of an area's Resources Basic Information (RBI) or Information Base. The area Resources Management Plan is the logical place to include this information; it is the only planning document that receives annual revision and updating.

The Implementation Plans must be the area's specific management programs that have been thoroughly researched, documented, and given public review.

Procedure must vary with the Region, the area and the available personnel.

There does not seem to be any best approach. A field area possessing both a knowledgeable and experienced Resources Management Specialist and Scientist, that can utilize the entire park staff and invited participants, such as knowledgeable scientists and Regional people, is the furthest ahead in developing a good initial document. The practice of involving all pertinent individuals and disciplines is always the best approach.

If everyone helps with the process, everyone shall be willing to accept the results.

Several of the Participant Questionnaires retained by course trainees stated that a main goal in attending this course was to "find out how to write a resources management plan." The answer to that question can be as detailed or as simple as you wish it to be. If you prefer the simple and productive answer, rather than the long-range and unproductive one, it starts with the development of a list of resource activities and problems for your area. It then includes the documentation of actions underway or needed for each of the items. That list of activities and needs becomes the Resources Management Program, the guts of the plan. Add a table of contents, programming sheets, and appendix and you have the plan draft.

Send that draft to the Regional Resources Management Plan coordinator for review at the Regional level. He will undoubtedly add a cover sheet, an environmental overview or negative declaration, and return it for final review and approval by the Superintendent. Upon being returned to the Regional Office it will receive final examination and the approval of the Regional Director.

And you have a Resources Management Plan.

It can be printed in gold or it can be typed and xeroxed and placed in a three-ring binder. I prefer the latter, as the document must be utilized as a viable document that continues to change as new information and projects arise. All changes must be brought up to date annually.

I might end my formal presentation with two bits of advise mouthed by wiser men than I:

- (1) "The first rule of intelligent tinkering is to save all the pieces."
- (2) "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."