

THE  
**FUTURE**  
OF  
**AMERICA'S**  
**NATIONAL**  
**PARKS**

First Annual  
Centennial Strategy for

# Hot Springs National Park

August 2007

CENTENNIAL INITIATIVE



Site: HOSP

Year: 2007

**Vision Statement**

The very idea of setting aside special places in the United States for the future enjoyment of its citizens originated here in 1832 when Congress established the Hot Springs Reservation to protect the 47 hot springs in the area.

The park is committed to the five objectives of the Centennial Challenge and looks forward to a future where more Americans visit the park and can enjoy the facilities and activities available. We would like to have more children enjoy the park by participating as much as possible in the yearly "America's Best Classroom" program. Continue to partner with local school EAST labs to create virtual tours of park facilities, including the 26 miles of trails, the historic Fordyce Bathhouse visitor center and museum, and the other bathhouses

The park strives to be a leader in looking for ways to save energy and make the park completely energy self-sufficient by 2016. We have already begun by purchasing electric vehicles, installing solar energy panels on park buildings, and are looking for partners to increase our energy self-sufficiency.

We have many ideas to increase visitation, including installing utility service to the campground. A project for 10 sites has been proposed with matching funding from the Friends group. This will make the campground more attractive to the millions of Americans vacationing in RVs and those who require more accessible recreational amenities.

We hope to have all six of the vacant historic bathhouses on Bathhouse Row in use and operational. We will complete renovation of the bathhouses to make them more "tenant ready" for the historic leasing program and obtaining lessees with private entities. The park will no longer be required to cover utility and maintenance costs of the vacant bathhouses, allowing these operational funds to be used in other areas, such as more visitor programs and tours.

We will use the seasonal hires funded through the CI to provide more interpretative programs, continue upkeep of park facilities and landscapes, and possibly assist in resource management projects that can, in turn, be interpreted to our visitors.

We hope to enter into long-term partnerships with the Arkansas CESU out of the University of Arkansas Monticello to identify ways to eradicate exotic vegetation and restore lands to their pre-developed condition with native species. The partnership can also be used to continue monitoring of the park's primary resource and why we are here—the thermal springs

**Park/ Superintendent/ Program Manager**

Josie Fernandez, Superintendent, Hot Springs National Park



Site: HOSP

STEWARDSHIP

**Improve the condition of park resources and assets.**

**Rehabilitate high-priority historic buildings to good condition, and help communities to preserve their history through programs like Preserve America.**

Continue a comprehensive program of rehabilitation of historic structures and maintenance of those structures once brought to good condition as identified in the Park's strategic plan. Continue work toward rehabilitation of the National Landmark Historic Bathhouses with the intention of creating an atmosphere conducive to successful leasing of those building to the private sector. Hot Springs National Park is home to 47 historic buildings and hundreds of other historically significant elements including the historic district, constructed grounds elements identified in maintained landscapes and many other structural elements. The repair/rehab program, line item construction program and the cyclic maintenance program are all utilized to accomplish this goal. Many projects currently exist in these systems.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

**Restore native habitats by controlling invasive species and reintroducing key plant and animal species.**

Hot Springs National Park has experienced several major boundary adjustments over the last 60-70 years. This included the acquisition of several older residential sub-divisions thought to be within the geothermal springs recharge zone. Over 300 old home sites have been removed since the 1970s, although restoration activities were largely restricted to structure demolition and cursory grading efforts. A number of very aggressive invasive exotics have now colonized virtually all of these disturbed lands and are successfully out-competing the native vegetation.

The problem exists for a variety of reasons. The sheer number of residential sites that became park property in a relatively short period of time was overwhelming. The availability of funds for removal occurred at an unpredictable rate and local park staff lacked the expertise to complete the restorations properly. Perhaps more critical was the general lack of knowledge regarding the invasives already present, their propensity to rapidly colonize open and disturbed landscapes, and their relative voracity.

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**Improve high-priority assets to acceptable condition, as measured by the Facility Condition Index.**

High-priority assets are identified in the FMSS. Deficiencies are identified and corrective measures planned and carried out in an ongoing program of improvement. The goal being to achieve a Facility Condition Index value indicative of assets in good condition. All aspects of special funding programs like Repair/Rehab, Cyclic and Line Item Construction are utilized to

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STEWARDSHIP

**Improve the condition of park resources and assets.**

bring those assets a to good condition and then to maintain them afterwards. Continuation of this process, already in place will assure accomplishment of this goal.

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**Improve the natural resources in parks, as measured by the vital signs developed under the Natural Resource Challenge.**

Hot Springs National Park hosts two old growth stands of oak/hickory/pine forest that have been found to be 400 or more years old. That arguably makes them some of the oldest stands of natural timber in the region and certainly within the State of Arkansas. Both stands fall within the original Hot Springs Reservation set aside by Congress in 1832. They were identified by the Heartland Network's Inventory and Monitoring workgroups and scheduled for an intensive stratified vascular plant study followed by a systematic monitoring program. A recently completed study suggests that careful re-introduction of prescribed fire might allow the two stands to slowly revert to a prehistoric climax for this region. Fire, utilized here as a reconstructive ecological tool, would also benefit park efforts to control and eliminate the encroaching exotics. These locations are both readily accessible to the visiting public by the existing trail system and offer an outstanding interpretive opportunity. With a careful future management strategy, the public would be afforded an ability to step back in time, long before the area had been permanently inhabited.

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**Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)**

As much as 80% of the recharge area vital to the continued health of the geothermal springs at Hot Springs National Park may fall outside of NPS influence. Research currently underway seems to point to the existence of the geothermal reservoir far to the north and east of the park. The park has already entered into a partnership with three other agencies with a common goal of better understanding and protecting the geothermal resources. Partnerships and cooperative agreements with many additional 'stake holders' will necessarily have to be undertaken and sustained if Hot Springs National Park's primary natural resource is to be preserved for future generations as its legislated mandate requires.

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**STEWARDSHIP**

Set the standard of excellence in urban park landscape design and maintenance.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

The Bathhouse Row cultural landscape is located in the urban part of the park. A major project would be to rehabilitate and improve the Bathhouse Row landscaped areas which include the Arlington Lawn and the Grand Promenade. The Cultural Landscape Report, currently 95% complete, identifies a number of recommendations that would help restore these areas. Some of the recommendations are: create display springs on Hot Springs Mountain from some that are not captured in the thermal water system, add irrigation to the Grand Promenade lawns, recreate a bandstand above the Formal Entrance. The park's Friends group has long been interested in partnering on the bandstand project and this would be an important addition to the Centennial Challenge program and the park's cultural landscape.

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**ENVIRONMENT**

Reduce environmental impacts of park operations.

Reduce the environmental impacts of park operations on air and water quality.

Continue the acquisition of E-85 flex fuel vehicles, electric vehicles, and vehicles and equipment that utilize bio-diesel fuel as the fleet is turned over. The ultimate goal is to operate a vehicle fleet that is completely free of petroleum-based fuels.

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**ENVIRONMENT**

Inspire an environmental conscience in Americans.

Demonstrate environmental excellence through increased use of alternative energy and fuels at every park.

Continue to install grid connected solar photovoltaic systems throughout the park with a goal of achieving 100% energy self sufficiency by 2016. One system in the process of installation now, three other major systems planned for the near future and several others in the process of feasibility study. The combination of distributed generation systems in conjunction with net metering strategies at this Park make the goal attainable. Utilize thermal water heat in a more significant way as the primary heat source for the major buildings on Bathhouse Row. Four systems currently installed in Park buildings.

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Serve as a model for energy efficiency, under Executive Order 13423, by ensuring Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards.

Continue with implementation of energy efficiency modifications and upgrades to all Park buildings including improved insulation, weather-stripping, Replacement of incandescent lamps with compact fluorescent and/or LED lamps and other energy conservation measures. This program forms a significant part of the overall energy strategy designed to meet 100% energy self sufficiency.

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**ENVIRONMENT**

Engage partners, communities, and visitors in shared environmental stewardship.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

The park proposes to form a partnership with the School of Forestry at the University of Arkansas, Monticello, through the CESU program. The objective of this partnership will be the systematic control and eradication of the unwanted exotics and gradual replacement with native species of trees, shrubs, and wildflowers. This partnership will provide the park with a road map that will facilitate the restoration of all of the affected acreage, eliminate the unwanted invasives, and provide for the ultimate re-introduction of native species indigenous to the area. Park staff will finally have the knowledge and skills necessary to sustain the restoration efforts (through time) that have been sorely lacking in the past. The park's strategic plan will be updated in order to include these natural resource issues and include their resolution as high priority, long-range goals. Deferred maintenance and/or cyclic requests should easily sustain funding needs in the future. Without this project, the park's vegetative communities will definitely sustain devastating consequences many of which may become irreversible.

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**RECREATION**

Encourage collaboration among and assist park and recreation systems at every level—federal, regional, state, local—to help build an outdoor recreation network accessible to all Americans.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Continually improve the facilities at the campground, including the installation of RV connections and water and sewer connections at campsites to attract a growing number of recreational vehicle visitors to the Park who would not otherwise visit. The improvement of the campground infrastructure provides an attractive support base to families who travel in motorhomes and travel trailers and who look for electrical connections and water service for their rigs when camping. Current projects in the system include the improvement of several additional campsites each year.

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EDUCATION

Cooperate with educators to provide curriculum materials, high-quality programs, and park-based and online learning.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Hire an education specialist at the park to inspire teachers and students with new and creative education programs that advance understanding of the history and the geology of Hot Springs National Park. These programs could be offered at the park and at area schools. The specialist could help the park develop new exhibits and programs that have interactive technology aspects to tell the park's story.

We plan to continue to request Parks are Classroom program funding to create exciting, innovative lesson plans about the park and the National Park System. We could develop a learning center in one of the bathhouses and hold teacher/student workshops at the park and continue to work with the local school EAST labs to create virtual tours of the parks 26 miles of trails, the historic bathhouses on Bathhouse Row and other areas of the park.

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EDUCATION

Impart to every American a sense of their citizen ownership of their national parks.

Increase visitors' satisfaction, understanding, and appreciation of the parks they visit.

Produce a new film containing scientific information on the park including multiple perspectives derived from primary historical documents to show the development of the American Spa and Hot Springs National Park. The new film will also address complaints from affiliated tribes about the lack of an American Indian perspective in the park movie and visitor center exhibits. The film will be based on documentation not available when the original film was produced. Accessibility issues will be resolved through better captioning and audio description via headsets. To broaden school and community outreach, a longer DVD version of the film will be available to local teachers to supplement their Parks as Classroom lesson plans. Also, with the increased emphasis on health and fitness activities, there is a growing interest in the park's hiking trails. This film will allow for visitors to see the opportunities available for outdoor recreation on the park's 26 miles of trails. Park visitors will be better able to utilize their time at the national park once they watch the film presentation and visitor satisfaction will increase.

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**PROFESSIONALISM**

Promote a safety and health culture for all employees and visitors.

Reduce the number of employee lost-time incidents and serious visitor injuries by 20 percent.

The park has exclusive jurisdiction of over 5,500 acres of forested and urban land. The downtown area of the city of Hot Springs is directly across the street from Bathhouse Row. Two of the three north/south highway routes run through the park which add to the difficulty of protection of visitors and employees in the park. The present level of law enforcement coverage is reactive rather than proactive. The park currently does not have 24-hour law enforcement coverage and foot patrols on Bathhouse Row, a high visitation area, is needed but cannot be accomplished with current staff. The VREP recommended level of LE staffing for the park is at least 11 rangers. With the increased staffing the park would be able to provide a wider range of patrol throughout the park and cover the night hours when much of the incidents in the park occur. Employee safety would be increased by allowing rangers to patrol in pairs instead of alone. The park also does not have dispatch capability and establishing a dispatch center would decrease response time. Currently it is necessary to call the city 911 line and have the message relayed to a park ranger through that radio system.

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