

DRAFT

THE STATE OF PLANNING
IN THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

A TASKFORCE REPORT

April 1991

Prepared by

TASKFORCE ON THE STATUS AND FUTURE OF PLANNING
IN THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR / NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE PLANNING:
YESTERDAY . . . TODAY . . . TOMORROW**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Prepared by
The Taskforce on the Status and Future of Planning
in the National Park Service**

April 1991

Traditional planning in the National Park Service has focused on preparation of general management plans, development concept plans, new area studies, wilderness plans, and other special resource studies. Various other plans are prepared by cultural and natural resource and operations staff at all levels. Park staff are directly involved in all levels of planning, including preparing statements for management and planning requirements. This issue paper primarily addresses GMPs, DCPs, and all types of special resource studies.

PROBLEM STATEMENT: Over the past decade or so, the National Park Service has been in a largely reactive mode with regard to addressing System-wide planning problems and future growth. An indicator is the relatively flat funding level during the decade of the 1980s for preparing plans and studies. In 1988, funding began to increase, along with a progressive demand for studies and growth in the System. By FY 1990, for example, \$2.682 million was appropriated for planning. In 1991, with \$6.974 million appropriated, only \$2.044 million was available for GMP-type planning after the earmarking of projects not directly related to the GMP planning program. The result was less (by \$638,000) available discretionary funding than the previous year for GMP planning and direct support of park needs.

With an average of 11 new units being added to the System each Congress over the last two decades, and with a dramatic increase in the types of planning being requested (e.g., national heritage corridors, partnership arrangements,

adjacent lands planning, visitor use studies), the focus of regular park planning is being shifted from the care and feeding of existing park units to more technical assistance type planning. This has a direct impact on the future of the National Park System. Will the National Park Service, as a unified, enthusiastic organization--or others--chart the destiny of the System and future programs?

RECOMMENDATIONS: An interdisciplinary Service taskforce came together to address a variety of issues resulting from recent trends. It recommends that:

1. A sufficient, constant level of funding should be identified by the Administration, in consultation with Congress, to ensure that traditional planning needs of existing units are adequately addressed on a systematic basis. Also, an analysis of the disciplines and skills required to meet future needs must be completed.

2. Technical assistance programs (State-side Land and Water Conservation Fund and Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance) should be base-funded to adequately respond to the increase in requests for the Service to assist a variety of expanding markets, including park units with adjacent land issues. The Service must also continue to build upon its capability to address the full spectrum of conservation assistance needs.

3. All planning programs should be better integrated at the WASO level, regardless of function (e.g., planning, cultural, natural, operations). An interdisciplinary group could be established to provide oversight and coordination, and to improve communications.

4. A new statutory system called "American Heritage Areas" should be developed on a similar basis to the Wild & Scenic Rivers System. To be included, an area would not require a test of national significance. The NPS role would be limited to technical assistance, grants, and short-term partnership arrangements. Matching funds would be required in some cases. Such a system would not carry the "arrowhead," but would carry the NPS ethic.

FUTURE ACTIONS: If these concepts are approved by the NPS Directorate, the taskforce will re-convene to develop an action plan for funding options, justification and need statements, and scenarios for addressing growing planning markets at all levels. Strategies would be developed to achieve consensus among NPS interest groups and appropriate committees of Congress.

INTRODUCTION

"The state of planning programs today" was the focus of the annual National Park Service park planning workshop held in Denver in December 1990. By consensus, the many program managers attending the workshop decided to form two working taskforces to address common planning concerns. One group was instructed to make a thorough assessment of the state of National Park Service planning programs now, and planning programs in the future. The other was told to look long and hard at various products prepared by the Service, and evaluate their usefulness in today's planning market.

The Taskforce on the Status/Future of Planning in the National Park Service met in February 1991. The objectives for our work were:

1. To identify the level and status of planning programs in the National Park Service as of FY 91.
2. To identify needs, pressures, and directions of traditional and non-traditional planning in the Service.
3. To identify interrelationships among planning programs, and potential opportunities.
4. To identify important management and planning needs that are not currently being accomplished.
5. To determine potential ways of fulfilling needs and expectations.
6. To identify potential ways of addressing special program initiatives.
7. To identify program, organizational, and funding possibilities for achieving growing needs.
8. To identify ways of integrating programs and offices into a common sense of purpose, mission, and capabilities.
9. To prepare a brief report to the NPS Directorate on the status of planning and opportunities for change, which will be presented to the 75th Anniversary Symposium in Vail, Colorado.

PLANNING TAKES SHAPE: THE 1980s

There has been a transformation in National Park Service planning programs during the past 3 years. We have taken a leap--from a period of relative planning stability and equilibrium to a period of escalating programs; the rapid and widespread addition of new National Park System units; and broad interest by members of Congress and the American people in gaining our assistance and also the status that ensues from involvement with the National Park Service.

The 1980s resulted in broad re-entrenchment of conservation actions that typified the previous two decades. The result was less government funding for environmental programs, and the consolidation of programs and functions within the Department of the Interior. "Rehabilitation of infrastructure" and "preservation of resources" became the bywords of the day. Planning stabilized, and programs and funding levels showed little change for several years. Staff levels were reduced, and some planning positions were moved to park units to accommodate other Service priorities of the day.

The focus of traditional National Park Service planning during the 1980-1987 period was mostly inward. Planning was mostly park-related, and emphasized visitor use, development, resource management, and the special concerns of established park units. Few broad initiatives were discussed. Little interest arose for special studies. The mood of the administration favored moderate, in-depth planning activity. Planners had the time to work more closely with park managers and staff to address immediate issues and needs, to program for the future, and to undertake needed administrative work relating to planning programs.

This is contrasted by the emergence of technical assistance planning under the Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program. By the end of the decade, technical assistance became a major program, with many recognized conservation successes.

PLANNING GATHERS MOMENTUM: THE 1990s

In 1988, Park Service planning picked up steam. Since then, planning programs have been changing and growing. Park planning today is oriented more toward land uses surrounding park units, special initiatives, legislative needs, special resource studies, and broad technical assistance that sometimes demand the human resources of the Service.

Priorities and pressures directed toward a broad mixture of economic interest and preservation needs are reflected in the budget. Funding levels continue to rise dramatically. Budgets include line items for actions or projects that have unclear objectives. New Service planning markets and demands continue to emerge. NPS responses have been largely reactive. And the Service's ability to direct its planning programs has not increased.

Today, Service planning expertise can be found not only in the Denver Service Center, but also in regional offices, the Washington office, field offices, and occasionally in park units. Much regional office planning energy is being redirected toward the increasing political pressures of addressing special studies and legislative priorities. For example, one of several new planning thrusts--the Service's Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program (Conservation Assistance Program), which was small in the early 1980s, is currently on a strong growth curve. With this growth has come the requirement that planning entities in some regional offices provide progressive assistance to other agencies and groups, rather than to traditional park units.

The construction-related Advance Planning Program has grown dramatically during the past 4 years--from \$14 million to a FY'91 level of almost \$44 million. Planning and comprehensive design needs demand more and more available manpower in the regional offices and the service centers. And these needs grow when earmarked construction projects appear on the scene without being preceded by sufficient planning and compliance actions, thereby requiring unanticipated planning staff effort prior to the completion of comprehensive designs.

The result of this growth and change in National Park Service planning is opportunity and frustration. The capacity of the Service to deal with the pressures of the growing programs appears inadequate, with little immediate relief. The list

of carry-over projects and studies grows progressively larger, and new starts are postponed until later and later into the current fiscal year. More traditional park planning programs often go unfunded, with little regional office or service center capability to address long-standing needs. A few park units receive much assistance, while many planning needs are not addressed.

In an attempt to understand these trends, many Service program managers are attempting to identify where planning resources are actually being allocated, and what types of needs are being addressed. For instance, the National Park System-wide Clapper Survey was undertaken during 1990 in an attempt to generally identify what types of planning actions were underway and what types of products were being produced. It provided the following data:

Planning for Authorized Parks/1988-1990

GMPs/amendments -----	86
DCPs -----	51
Boundary studies -----	6
Preliminary advance	
Planning and design -----	30
Newly authorized areas -----	18
IP's -----	<u>35</u>
Subtotal -	226

Other Types of Planning

Congressionally-directed -----	39
Special studies -----	80
Conservation assistance -----	112
Miscellaneous	
legislative support -----	<u>18</u>
Subtotal -	249

This data reveals that, while a large number and broad range of planning activities are underway in the Service, less than half of that overall program accounts for traditional planning services (and also that some special initiatives are not included).

Special studies, legislative-support actions, and Conservation Assistance Program projects are demanding more and more time and expertise from many senior Service planning staff. The result of this trend means that less time and fewer services may be provided to existing Service units, although

these new projects are proving to be very important to promoting the image and future of the National Park Service.

Some people may not realize how direct the linkage is between legislation and planning. As legislative initiatives increase, the involvement of Service planning staff increases accordingly. Much of the data typically prepared for hearings and briefings is most logically and best prepared by planning staff.

Non-planning-program staff within the Service are also becoming more involved in various specialized types of planning, such as land use and protection planning (for example, the Civil War Battlefield program). In order to maintain credibility, it is important for the Service to ensure that these non-planning staffs possess adequate expertise to undertake these specialized types of planning.

Planning funding levels have increased dramatically above the levels of the early 1980s during the past few years. These planning funds are derived from many sources, including substantial National Park Service basic operational funds used to operate some regional office planning functions. The following data for the basic 416 park and recreational planning account shows recent trends:

<u>Recent Funding Trends</u>											
<u>FY 80</u>	<u>81</u>	<u>82</u>	<u>83</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>85</u>	<u>86</u>	<u>87</u>	<u>88</u>	<u>89</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>91</u>
\$2.9	3.7	2.2	2.3	2.9	2.4	2.2	2.3	1.7	2.0	2.7	7.0
(in millions)											

There were few earmarked budget items in the General Management Plan (GMP) planning program of the early 1980s. This has changed dramatically, with \$3,680 million earmarked funds in FY 1991. With the earmarked items, \$1 million set aside for the Presidio Project in San Francisco, and an over-appropriation of \$250,000, the total amount available for park-related planning in FY 1991, was \$2.044 million. This total reveals that fewer park-related planning funds are available in FY 1991 than were available in FY 1990. It seems clear that the earmarking of project funds has resulted in some inflexibility, and in the allocation of funds and human resources to specific geographic areas and project types, leaving many identified Service priorities to go unattended.

We now know that the level of available park-related planning funds is insufficient to keep pace with the requirements to plan for new units of the System and revise existing plans. Park plans are generally considered to be viable for 15

years, although many require revision within 5 years. Current Service estimates reveal that an adequate annual funding level for park planning and reasonable special studies program is in the \$10 million range.

General Management Planning funding data can be compared with funding trends for the past 5 years for the Service's expanding Conservation Assistance Program.

Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program Funding

<u>FY 1987</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1990</u>
1.041	1.975	3,162	3.860	4,730

In 1987, there were no earmarked items in the Conservation Assistance Program. In 1991, such items accounted for \$741,000 of the total program, resulting in some inflexibility in allocating program funds and developing programs in some regions.

Recent funding levels respond directly to the expanding nation-wide interest in more conservation assistance from the National Park Service. It appears clear that conservation assistance is also on a strong growth curve.

PLANNING FACES CHALLENGE: THE NEXT HALF-DECADE

Projecting current trends and attempting to forecast future planning needs 3 to 5 years in advance have led the taskforce to the conclusion that the current problems may only be compounded, with more inflexibility and competing demands. The planning status taskforce hopes that some of the recommendations identified in this report provide for a more productive climate in which the Service may provide broad planning services.

National Park Service planning program managers have identified many issues of varying importance that should be addressed. The following appear to be the most critical:

1. There is no indication that current trends in planning programs will change in the next 2 to 3 years, and demands and the growth curve for services will probably increase. How can the Service create opportunities to improve organizational structure, interaction among the various planning programs, and delivery systems, and to influence funding characteristics and enhance human-resource development and staff availability to enable planning to stay ahead of the curve?

2. The demand for planning services from the National Park Service--that is, the range of markets--is growing exponentially. The Service needs a more proactive approach. Interest in technical-assistance areas, ranging from historic preservation to land-use planning is growing rapidly. Heritage corridors, new preservation models, and cultural landscapes are common topics of discussion among Service staff, members of Congress, and the conservation-minded public. How can the Service become productively involved with such needs and fulfill other primary Service missions and operational requirements?

3. Tourism! Where will the burgeoning interest for more Service involvement lead us? Although some people cringe at the word "tourism," it is fundamental to the National Park System and its evolution. Partnership opportunities appear everywhere in an unlimited variety. Historic preservation linked with tourism seems to be a combination that has captured the attention of the Nation. There is a growing interest on the part of Americans to learn about their country and its heritage, and in preserving what once may have been viewed as commonplace. The widespread interest in the Route 66 study is one of many examples. How can the

Service provide definition to its role, and educate others about what we can reasonably do and not do?

4. Some people suggest that the future of Service planning programs is unguided, and on a random trajectory. How can the Service improve control and influence so that fundamental park needs are realized, while still meeting other needs that are becoming vital to the future of the Service?

5. Recently, the mission statement of the National Park Service was officially broadened. How can we keep our commitment to established units of the National Park System as the Service addresses new opportunities? And how can we identify and follow avenues to influence the future?

So many critical issues--challenges--opportunities--await us--some of them not addressed by the National Park Service thus far! What about building a "national system of parks" that includes the Service's units as well as state and local facilities? There seems to be no doubt that the pendulum swing of the 1980s is following a new direction--and it's exciting to consider that the Service's planning program could influence the direction!

Taskforce discussions resulted in many valuable ideas and concepts regarding partnership park concepts, affiliated areas, and management roles in heritage corridors. While these issues are all very timely and need critical analysis and attention, this report does not attempt to provide comprehensive recommendations for partnership park policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Professionals within and outside of the National Park Service have voiced suggestions for improving the accomplishments of our planning efforts. The most exciting challenge for the taskforce was consolidating and weighing them, and focusing upon the few key opportunities that could make a difference. The major concerns we are basing our recommendations upon are: the need to expand the Service's capacity to serve and care for existing park units; the need for better integration and utilization of the technical planning capabilities of the Service; the need for more WASO program communication; and the need to develop a systematic means to address growing pressures and opportunities. These concerns were transformed into significant, specific "opportunities"--that is, recommendations for positive change and improvement in the state of Service planning.

We offer these specific recommendations now to the Directorate, as the formal recommendation statement of the Taskforce on the Status and Future of Planning in the National Park Service:

1. Expand our capacity to serve the growing needs of parks. The National Park Service should undertake a set of actions designed to improve capabilities at all levels to provide more assistance to park units and improve the capabilities of park staff to address park-related planning needs. Specific actions should include:

- Improve planning delivery systems at the Washington office, service center, regional office, and park levels. More service center planners need to have the capability and time to fully address identified park-planning priorities other than construction-related planning/design priorities. Maintaining experienced professional team captains/project leaders is vital. Identifying and training potential team captains is a high priority. A formal intake program for team captains should be initiated.
- Provide broad-based Denver Service Center social-, cultural-, and natural-resource specialists to address expanding project needs, now that more formal environmental documents are being required.

- Develop improved organizational linkages between service center/regional planners and technical-assistance groups to utilize capabilities and expertise where it is most needed. Manpower development is needed to improve the capabilities and understanding of groups such as cultural resource staff, which are becoming progressively more involved in land-use planning.
- Develop funding and staff capability to assimilate more resource data and scoping information prior to beginning major studies and plans. The Service should have such a program, and an identified funding source for this purpose.
- Increase flexibility among broad planning-program areas to provide for the use of planning expertise where it is most needed--regardless of the funding source or program organization. For example, if an earmarked project is more technical assistance in nature than park planning, it should be undertaken by conservation assistance staff. Also, technical assistance staff should be available to provide assistance with some park plans that may need their specialized skills.
- Continue to improve linkages and communication between planning-program and legislative-program staff.
- Enhance the ability of regional office staff to provide more direct assistance to parks for such needs as scoping, consultations, and "good neighbor planning" with park neighbors. Park planners need to spend more time in park units communicating and interacting with managers and staff. Park staff should be trained and encouraged to address issues beyond park boundaries.
- Consider organizational modifications that would place planning under a separate functional manager in the service center.
- Continue to increase the capacity for providing interpretive planning in the Denver Service Center for general management and development concept plans.
- Provide park managers with the opportunity to obtain technical assistance skills and the capability to use improved delivery systems.

- Get ahead of the curve on special-resource and new-area studies by preparing a National Park Service priority list of studies that the Service supports and that justify major studies, and by accomplishing more theme studies.
- Make advancements in public relations, conflict resolution, and intergovernmental relations. Park managers and staff need these skills as much as planners.
- Obtain more funds and FTE for all offices that provide direct park-planning services to field units. Certain changes in funding characteristics may be very useful. Park and recreational planning funds are normally 1-year funds and do not carry over to the next fiscal year. The Service needs to undertake actions to change this program funding policy so that funds could be better utilized.
- Prepare and market new budget strategies, and obtain assistance from the conservation and preservation communities to help with the appropriation process. Recent analyses have illustrated that a strong, viable park-planning and special-studies program would require approximately \$10 million per year.

2. Enhance the capability of technical-assistance programs to provide for growing planning-program needs. Many of the planning needs that take so much manpower capacity to address could be undertaken by enhancing the capabilities of technical-assistance programs. Specific actions should include:

- Provide more flexibility in the technical assistance areas for these staff to help address some of the growing pressures for studies, rather than having the service center planners address most special resource study needs.
- Modify the funding allocation system in technical-assistance programs so that staff can undertake a broader range of projects and assist on park-planning projects for specialized needs.
- Expand the capabilities of the Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program into a broader Conservation Assistance program, with enhanced

capabilities for external assistance and more help for park units. Expansion should be undertaken with full recognition that broad conservation assistance to state and local governments is a fundamental responsibility of the Service and also must continue to grow.

- Integrate more cultural- and natural-resource specialists with the technical-assistance programs so that a broader range of needs can be addressed by these programs.
- Seek base funding for most technical-assistance planning functions, while realizing that some additional earmarked funds will probably occur in any given fiscal year.
- Provide technical-assistance staff to assist park managers in "good neighbor planning" and community relations with such needs as interfacing with other Federal, state, and local governments, greenway planning, open space planning, adjacent land use planning, and gateway and economic development planning.

3. Develop an "American Heritage Areas Program" for the National Park System. The National Park Service should develop programs designed to meet new planning directions, and should organize and seek funding for a separate program in the Service that would focus on meeting cultural- and natural-preservation needs and economic objectives, and also meet the needs of conservation cooperators, without establishing new park units and long-term operational responsibilities. This program would address conservation opportunities that are assumed not to be new National Park Service units. This program would offer the following opportunities:

- The Service would offer alternatives to the establishment of a new park unit for areas that may not meet NPS criteria, and members of Congress could meet some/all of their needs.
- Limit the number of new-area studies required by the Service.
- This program would provide the status of National Park Service involvement, would leave control with state and local leaders, and would provide a package of conservation tools to address preservation and economic needs.

- Involvement with this program would include an assumption that any specific American Heritage Area would not become a new National Park System unit, and that lands would not necessarily be taken off the local tax rolls.
- A primary objective of this program would be broad assistance to help preserve, conserve, and interpret America's character and special places.
- Assistance by the National Park Service would be limited to a specified time period--for example, 5 years.
- Establishment of this program would need to include an acknowledgement that existing units such as established heritage corridors and affiliated areas would not be de-authorized. While more of these areas may be authorized in the future, hopefully the American Heritage Area concept would fulfill this need.
- An American Heritage Area would:
 - not have the "NPS arrowhead," but might be identified on maps for tourism purposes;
 - contain important natural-/cultural-resource values, possibly including NNLs and NHLs;
 - be generally viewed as not suitable/feasible for addition to the National Park System;
 - represent some element(s) of "distinctive American character";
 - be managed by others than the National Park Service;
 - have to meet certain criteria to be eligible for National Park Service assistance and potential Federal funding;
 - target State-side Land and water Conservation Funds to assist these areas for such purposes as protecting greenways.
 - have generally unprotected resource values;
 - require, by virtue of establishment by Congress, a study/reconnaissance and authorizing legislation;

have available a "tool box" assistance package, including (but not limited to) technical assistance and planning, challenge grants, historic preservation grants, potential LWCF grants, assistance with establishing land trust or special land use plans, and access to HABS/HAER assistance;

include areas such as the Quinebaug-Shetucket Rivers Corridor, the New England Governors List of Special Places, Vermont Landscapes, special cultural landscapes nationwide, and the Texas Lower Rio Grande Heritage Project.

Implementation of these recommendations by the Taskforce on the Status and Future of Planning in the National Park Service will result in broad improvements in the Service's ability to provide for the needs of established units, and will creatively meet the growing nationwide interest in assistance from and involvement with the National Park Service.

FUTURE ACTIONS

If the recommendations of this taskforce are approved by the NPS Directorate, the taskforce will re-convene to develop an action plan to include funding options, justification and need statements, scenarios for addressing growing planning markets at all levels, and draft legislation/support data for the American Heritage Area concept. Strategies need to be prepared to help achieve consensus among NPS interest groups and appropriate committees of Congress. This, coupled with implementation of recommendations by the taskforce on planning products, will serve us well in the years ahead, as the Service assumes an innovative leadership role.

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