

# National Park System Advisory Board

## TASK DIRECTIVE FOR A REPORT ON THE FUTURE OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM (June 1, 2000)

### I. BACKGROUND

National Park Service Director Robert Stanton has asked the National Park System Advisory Board to take a long-range, scholarly look at the future of national parks and the National Park Service. He said --

The world has changed profoundly since the late 19th century when the first parks were created, and the Park Service has assumed responsibilities and is facing challenges never anticipated when the agency was established in August 1916. It is now increasingly difficult to accomplish the Service's core mission of preserving nationally-significant resources unimpaired for the future, when intensely developed landscapes are pressing upon or surrounding many parks, and when air- and water-borne pollutants from outside park boundaries are degrading park resources. Moreover, the national park system has experienced phenomenal growth in recent years, with the addition of more than 100 new parks since 1973. These include new kinds of parks, such as urban recreation areas, free-flowing rivers, long distance trails, and historic sites that affirm the nation's social achievements, its triumphs and tragedies. Over the years, the mission of the Service has been extended, and today the agency is charged to provide assistance to the States and local governments to help them preserve local riverways, trails, and historic sites and structures and to develop recreation facilities. The Service is also called upon to partner in community-based efforts nationwide to create "Heritage Areas," systems of nationally-recognized lands and resources that include established communities where citizens continue to live, work and play.

The Director asked the Board to reflect on this history, to consider new communication patterns and programs that might be needed to confront different challenges and pursue new directions, and to issue a report with findings and recommendations.

### II. TASK

The Board will undertake a review and develop a report that focuses broadly on the purposes and prospects for the national park system over the next 25 years (2000-2025), a period of time in which the National Park Service will mark its centennial year. The review will not address short-term, day-to-day operational challenges. The Board will recognize that national parks in the 21st century can not be regarded by themselves, but as elements in a national mosaic of efforts seeking to accomplish a larger conservation, education and recreation mission. With this understanding, the review will consider that the National Park Service manages not only places, but also programs, and it works in partnership with all levels of government and private interests to promote common interests.

The Board will prepare a short report of 5,000 to 7,000 words written in a style that is simple and direct. Every effort will be made to avoid the use of organizational and program jargon. The primary audience for the report is the Director of the National Park Service and, by extension, policy-makers in the Administration and Congress.

In preparing the report, the Board will consider that America's changed landscapes and demographics, emerging technologies and national priorities have profound implications for the Service. The report will take into consideration that while the stated purposes of national parks have remained essentially unchanged, today parks are becoming vital components of national and global efforts to preserve biodiversity. The relationship between these preserved landscapes and living human cultures will also be investigated. The report will consider how the Park Service, which has served as the model for national park agencies worldwide, can offer continued leadership in the international arena. The report

will explore the current and future capacity of the Service to address these and other evolving purposes.

A central goal of the Board is to communicate its ideas effectively to the target audience and the American people, as well. To that end, the Board will explore prospects for collaboration with a third party to help prepare the report. The third party should be an institution with stature and a reputation for objectivity and scholarship. The Board may wish to explore opportunities to use video, the internet, or other media to supplement its report and broaden its communications reach.

In the course of gathering information for the report, the Board may wish to advise the Director separately about issues that are of current concern.

### **III. ACTIVITIES AND DUTIES**

The Board will collect information through a variety of means.

#### **A. Committees of the Board**

Committees will propose to the Board the issues, findings and recommendations for its report. In preparing these proposals, the committees will --

1. Consider National Park Service strategies to meet evolving organizational purposes, focusing specifically on its priority efforts:

- to build capacity in science-based resource management and sustainability;
- to ensure historic preservation programs reflect the breadth of America's experience;
- to broaden and professionalize its workforce;
- to communicate more effectively the relevance of parks and Park Service programs to the nation's increasingly diverse population.
- to enhance communications with Federal, State and local entities.

Committees will utilize reports derived from the work to date to distill and analyze the key issues and develop positions and solutions for Board consideration.

2. Consider the following questions posed by the Director --

- How should the National Park Service of the future reconcile resource preservation with visitor enjoyment?
- In what directions should the national park system be expanded?
- How should the Service preserve park resources in altered and changing landscapes?
- How should the Service respond to the nation's changing population and demographics?
- What is the Service's role as an educational organization?
- How should the Service distinguish itself from other land management agencies and conservation organizations?

The committees will accomplish their work by conducting conference calls and holding meetings. Committees will consult with National Park Service personnel and other knowledgeable individuals and with organizations that have information pertinent to the work of the Board. Committees can include as members individuals who are not members of the Advisory Board. NPS program managers will provide staff support to the committees. The National Park Service Office of Policy will provide overall coordination for the committees.

#### **B. The National Park Service General Conference**

Board members are encouraged to attend Discovery 2000: The National Park Service General Conference in St. Louis, Missouri. The conference is organized to develop ideas about the Service's responsibilities and future directions in four areas of central concern: cultural resources stewardship; natural resource stewardship; education; and leadership. The National Park Service will prepare and make available to the Board a summary of the Discovery 2000 conference proceedings.

### **C. Consultation with the Public**

The Board will consult with select groups of experts in relevant disciplines, constituent organizations, knowledgeable practitioners and NPS officials, and it will provide an opportunity for input from the general public. A detailed strategy for accomplishing this task will be developed within 60 days. At this time, the task anticipates that both the committees and the full Board will conduct these consultations.

### **D. Scholars' Retreat**

The Board will sponsor a retreat to explore the future of the national park system with a small group of nationally-recognized scholars from various disciplines, including those of history, anthropology, and the social and life sciences. The retreat will discuss the relevance of the national park system and the role of the National Park Service in 21<sup>st</sup> century American life. Discussions will include consideration of the questions raised in section III A.2 above.

### **E. Individual Board Member Travel**

Board members are encouraged individually to visit National Park Service offices and sites. When notified about members' interests, the National Park Service Office of Policy will coordinate these visits with appropriate National Park Service officials.

## **IV. DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE**

### **Office of Policy May 22 - Jun 15, 2000**

- Identify and coordinate discussions with third party
- Coordinate Board's identification of and contacts with scholars for the retreat
- Schedule and begin holding committee conference calls and meetings

### **Committee Activities May 2000 - Feb 2001**

- Identify key issues July 1, 2000
- Conduct consultations and prepare position papers Jul 1 - Nov 14, 2000
- Develop preliminary findings/recommendations Feb 5, 2001

### **General Conference Sept 11-15, 2000**

### **Conference Summary to the Board Nov 1, 2000**

### **Board Meeting Nov 14, 15 and 16, 2000**

### **Scholars' Retreat Feb 5, 6 and 7, 2001**

### **Draft Report Completed Mar 30, 2001**

### **Spring Board Meeting--Deliver final Report May 2001**