

March 31, 1999

DRAFT

**THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
PUBLIC SAFETY INITIATIVE**

Issue:

- Visitor safety has always been a stated concern of the National Park Service. It is a responsibility that has been addressed independently in each park/site without the benefit of objective, research-based information on how to effectively communicate those risks to the public.
- Each year many visitors are seriously injured and killed while recreating in NPS areas. Addressing the prevention of these incidents is the responsibility of each park manager. There is no information-sharing between parks on how to address a particular public safety problem, nor any central repository for public safety information.
- The National Park Service has no strategy for managing visitor safety.

Background and Rationale for Public Safety Initiative:

- Millions of people enjoy recreational opportunities each year at National Park Service (NPS) units. Visitation to these 378 National Park units exceeded 275 million visitor days in 1998. The National Park Service received the second highest favorable rating (85%) in a poll of Federal Agencies conducted recently by the Pew Research Center.
- The public seeks a wide range of experiences and recreational opportunities which include anything from a quiet nature walk to “risk recreation” activities such as rock climbing, SCUBA diving, hang gliding, and personal watercraft. Any of these activities can and have resulted in visitor accidents.
- The National Park Service does not ensure public safety nor can it anticipate all risks and hazards that visitors encounter or choose to be exposed to. Many NPS environments can be inherently dangerous to the unwary. Efforts to minimize public safety hazards and injuries must be consistent with the NPS Organic Act of 1916. This requires that we balance these efforts with our duty to minimize intrusion upon natural and historic resources, minimize environmental impacts, and do so within limits of available funding and staffing.
- As we experience an increase in demand for more recreational opportunities and higher risk activities, we can expect an increase in visitor accidents. New strategies and approaches are needed to address these emerging problems.

Action Items:

- Establish a select Public Safety Advisory Team representing park management, the public, park operations, concessioners, and risk management.
- Conduct a comprehensive study to evaluate public risk and measure public perception of those risks.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current methods of communicating the hazards in the recreating environment to park visitors. Determine how the Service's Case Incident Reporting System (CIRS) might be modified and used to capture significant visitor accident data.
- Identify efficient and effective methods for sharing information on visitor safety issues and recommendations for mitigation Servicewide in a timely manner.

Expected Outcome/Results of Advisory Team:

- The Public Safety Advisory Team (PSAT) will develop a comprehensive Strategic Plan for Public Safety to include risk reduction methods, intervention strategies, and an Implementation Plan that includes time lines and the names of individuals responsible for implementing the Strategic Plan.
- Information obtained from the Social Science Visitor Safety Perception Survey should be integrated into the Strategic Plan.
- The Plan will address The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) Goal IIa2.

Proposed Schedule:

- The first Public Safety Advisory Group Meeting - no later than June 30, 1999, in Denver, CO. * (Date established is June 22-24, 1999, approximately 2 ½ - 3 days.)
- Public Safety Strategic Plan Draft – August 1, 1999
- The Public Safety Study – Completed – June 1, 2000. PSAT meets to integrate study into final Strategic Plan – July 1, 2000
- The Strategic Plan Implementation begins – August 1, 2000.

Resources Needed:

- Funding for meetings, travel, facilitators, and staff assistance for the PSAT, for contract management assistance, and other needs associated with the Public (Visitor) Safety Initiative and Strategic Plan will be borne by the Risk Management Program Office.

Proposed Public Safety Advisory Group (7-10 members):

1. Park Facilities Manager -- SMAC Representative or a Park Chief of Maintenance
2. Concessions Specialist/Manager -- Peggy Williams -SEKI

3. Ranger Activities -- Ranger Advisory Group Representative --
4. Design Center Planner -- Denver Service Center
5. Park Superintendent --
6. Park Safety Manager – Gary Bornholdt - SEKI
7. Associate Regional Director --
8. Public - Dr. James Hecht – Hecht Foundation, Denver, CO.
9. Concessionaire's Association Representative or National Park Foundation Representative
10. Interpretive Planner – Sam Vaughan -- Harper's Ferry Center -- WV

Speakers-

Jennie Sparkes - Parks Canada
Gary Machlis – NPS Chief Social Scientist

Advisors/Reviewers

Jennie Sparkes – Parks Canada
Gary Machlis – NPS Chief Social Scientist - University of Idaho
George Vaughan – Public Health Service Officer – South East Region
Solicitor's Office/ Torts Claim Representative
Richard Powell – Program Manager, Risk Management Office
Claudia Finney - Risk Manager -- Risk Management Office
Linda Canzanelli – Park Operations Coordinator

Facilitator

Marilyn Hof – Denver Service Center

Administrative Support (2)

Prepared by Claudia Finney, RMD/3/8/99
Reviewed/ revised by Dick Powell, RMD/3/26/99
Minor corrections, Claudia Finney/3/31/99