



Program Purpose

To provide parks with comprehensive planning services/products, covering the full spectrum of water resources, that will assist in their efforts to achieve or maintain water resource integrity.

Introduction

Water is a particularly important and sensitive ecosystem component, and it plays a central role in the social, economic, environmental, and political mosaic of units of the national park system. Its physical availability and quality are critical determinants of a park's overall natural resource condition. Because of the important role of water in maintaining resource condition, it is the policy of the NPS to maintain, rehabilitate, and perpetuate the inherent natural integrity (Figure 1) of water resources and water-dependent environments occurring within the national park system.

Proper management of water resources within the NPS is becoming more complex and challenging as threats to this resource, both internal and external to park boundaries, increase. Scientists and managers are increasingly called upon to respond to disruptions of water resources that threaten the quality of human life and environmental sustainability. However, less than 10 percent of those parks with significant water resources have any type of aquatic resource specialist. It was with those parks in mind that the Water Resources Division initiated a planning program in 1991. The central theme to this program was to assist parks in building comprehensive, integrated, and durable agendas in water management. The resulting planning process and its products assisted in the development of park-wide management strategies and ensured that park managers and policy makers had adequate and timely information to protect, enhance, and use water resources.

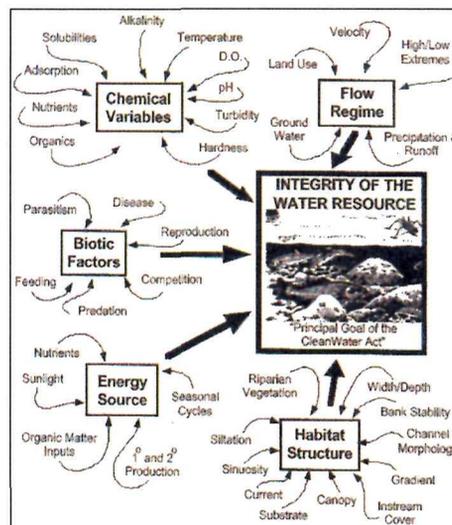


Figure 1. Factors important to the integrity of water resources.

Water Resources Planning Program

The management of the national park system is directed by federal law, NPS policy, and park planning, in that order. Planning is a decision-making process that helps managers determine the best way to comply with law and policy in those instances where management discretion is allowed, and the best way to address the many competing interests in parks that are not directly addressed by law or policy.

Presently overall park planning is guided by *Park Planning Program Standards* issued in August 2004 (Figure 2). These standards provide a logical flow established through several levels of planning that become increasingly detailed and complementary by agreeing first on why a park was established and

what resource conditions should exist and then increasingly focused on how those conditions should be maintained or achieved.

The water resources planning program offers the following planning products to parks, via technical assistance, that are designed to integrate into the overall park planning framework (Figure 2).

Water Resources Foundation Report

A *Water Resources Foundation Report* is designed to address the needs of a park's Foundation for Planning and Management document, the now formalized precursor to the General Management Plan (GMP) (Figure 2). The primary objectives of the Water Resources Foundation Report are to:

- 1) synthesize information on the existing conditions of the park's water resources;
- 2) identify and describe the park's fundamental and/or important water resources, building from the park's purpose and significance statements, and
- 3) identify stakeholders and laws and policies that apply to these fundamental and important water resources.

Water Resources Stewardship Report

The *Water Resources Stewardship Report*, is designed specifically to address the water resource needs in a park's *Resource Stewardship Strategies* (draft Director's Order 2.1: *Resource Stewardship Planning*; Figure 2). This report develops strategies that enable a park to achieve or maintain a park's *desired conditions* for water resources with measurable or objective indicators that assess the degree to which the *desired conditions* are being achieved.

Water Resources Information and Issues Overview

The *Water Resources Information and Issues Overview* report, as the name implies, provides water resources information and analyzes major water resource issues within the context of that information. However, it maintains a flexible design that can serve a park's unique water resource needs. For example, a water resource-base park, such as a wild and scenic river, may have a basic need to inform stakeholders of the conditions of its water resources and to identify the water resources issues it faces. The report can serve as a "stand alone" document or as a precursor for the GMP or Water Resources Stewardship Report.

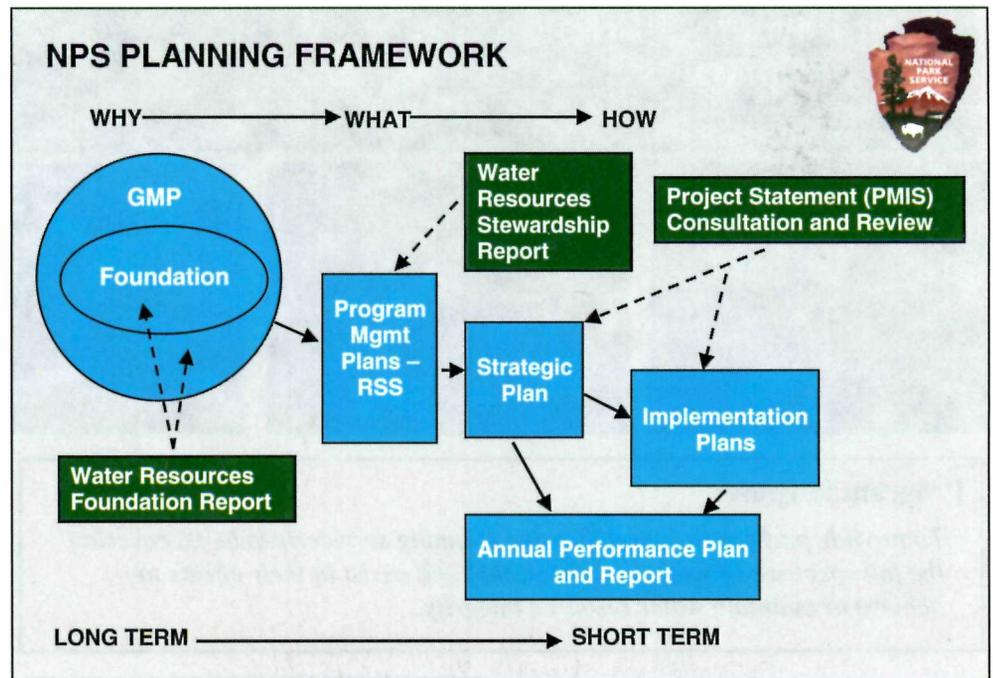


Figure 2. The "new" NPS framework for planning and decision making (blue boxes). Green boxes represent WRD planning or assistance. RSS = Resource Stewardship Strategy.

These reports typically pave the way for cooperative efforts between the NPS and other stakeholders, including federal, state, and local agencies, nonprofit organizations, and Native Americans. During the development of these documents, emphasis is placed on multi-stakeholder participation and review. This generates local and regional endorsement of NPS management directions for addressing water resource issues.

Additional Services and Products

- Provides policy and technical review and input for water resource aspects of NPS planning documents (project agreements, General Management Plans, Resource Stewardship Strategies, special resource studies, etc.) and comparable external documents, as necessary.
- Provides initial review and assignment of external NEPA documents forwarded to WRD for comment.
- Provides consultation on and review of water-based PMIS project statements that address the priorities of the park's Strategic Plan.

Public Awareness and Education

Parks are encouraged to communicate to the public what water resources are fundamental and important to the park, educating them on the desired conditions for these resources. Assistance can be provided by the NPS Water Resources Division to park interpretive staff, taking information from the water resource documents and summarizing in an understandable and educational format, such as a visitor brochure, for those interested.

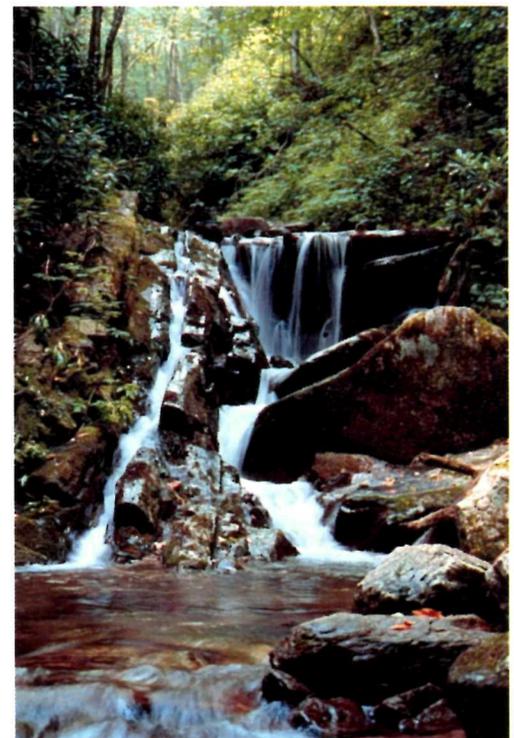
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WRD Planning Web Site:

WRD planning reports are available at our website:

www.nature.nps.gov/water/planning

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