



NATIONAL PARKS (1981, R1991, R2000, R2001, R2007)

Policy Statement

The American Society of Landscape Architects believes that National Parks are critical ecological reserves of biological diversity. As scenic landscape, National Parks provide for restoration of mind and body, serve as models of environmental quality, and preserve a significant natural and cultural heritage. These sites serve as environmental barometers and laboratories for scientific inquiry, which provide educational experiences contributing to an environmentally literate population. National Parks are a source of national pride and identity; therefore, expansion and professional management of the National Park System is critical to the well being of the nation.

Rationale

National parks had their origin when Yellowstone National Park was authorized by the Congress in 1872. By this action, the people of the United States established the idea of setting aside national and cultural areas of national significance for the benefit of future generations. The concept grew into a national park system including significant sites important to our cultural heritage.

Population pressures are increasing and threatening a wide range of park resources. Air and water pollutants originating outside national parks are fouling park environments and invasions of exotic plants threaten native plant communities. The greatest threats to national parks are external, requiring that park authorities adopt more aggressive external public relations, conservation education, and regional planning programs. Merely setting aside large areas as national parks is not sufficient to protect these resources and efforts should be made to buffer our park areas from this degradation. Where feasible, national parks should encompass viable ecosystems, complete watersheds and areas that fully protect resource values.

The National Park System should be managed so as to protect their resources in perpetuity. Management should be based on the best scientific data, resource inventories, monitoring systems and research on these natural and cultural resources.

As land values spiral and competition for land stiffens, it becomes more difficult to acquire parklands. While acquisition of park lands in fee title may be the most desirable option, less-than-fee options which protect inherent values should be utilized to reduce expenditures and social disruption. Sometimes a particular value, such as pastoral scenery, can best be protected through less-than-fee means or through partnership arrangements with local governments and private institutions. National parks should be comprehensively planned using multi-disciplinary teams, an ecosystems and sustainable approach, user involvement and assessment of resource suitabilities and limitations. Visitor and management facilities should be subordinate to resource values and in character with the landscape and regional setting, and should be of the highest quality design, construction and maintenance standards. Carrying capacities should be established, with restrictions on visitation where needed, in order to preserve resources and provide for quality visitor experiences. Alternative transportation systems, which replace private vehicles in the parks and lessen the resource damage caused by excessive traffic and facilities to accommodate that traffic, should be implemented.

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