

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

RECORD OF DECISION

**FINAL GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN
AND
ABBREVIATED FINAL
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

Booker T. Washington National Monument

Pursuant to Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), Public Law 91-190 as amended, and specifically to regulations promulgated by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1505.2), the Department of the Interior, National Park Service, has prepared the following Record of Decision on the Abbreviated Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the General Management Plan (GMP) for the Booker T. Washington National Monument in Virginia.

INTRODUCTION: Booker T. Washington National Monument (BOWA), located in Franklin County, Virginia, was established on April 2, 1956. Public Law 84-464 called for the establishment of the monument and indicated that "...the Secretary of the Interior is authorized and directed to acquire...real property located at Booker T. Washington Birthplace, Virginia...and shall be a public national memorial to Booker T. Washington."

Public Law 95-625, the National Parks and Recreation Act, requires the preparation and timely revision of general management plans (GMP) for each unit of the national park system. Section 604 of that act describes the requirements for GMPs as including "...measures for the preservation of the area's resources...indications of types and general intensities of development associated with public enjoyment and use...indications of potential modifications to the external boundaries of the unit and the reasons therefore...and identification of and implementation commitments for visitor carrying capacity". The previous GMP for BOWA was approved in 1980. Issues associated with managing BOWA have changed considerably since 1980 and that plan no longer adequately guided the policy and operational decisions facing park managers.

Some of the key issues that have emerged over the last twenty years and that are considered in the GMP/EIS include the need to: provide effective treatment of the cultural landscape; address adjacent land use, park boundary, transportation and viewshed impacts; resolve confusion concerning reconstructed park structures; enhance the range of interpretive and educational opportunities while fully developing the full interpretive potential of the site; provide for more efficient and accessible visitor and park staff facilities and amenities; and work more effectively with local, regional and national partners to achieve the park's mission.

The plan identifies the purpose, significance, mission, goals and interpretive themes for BOWA. The GMP/EIS provides a framework for guiding future decisions and outlines long-term strategies for protecting park resources, providing for high-quality interpretive and educational opportunities, offering a fuller range of visitor services, strengthening partnership opportunities, and providing for more efficient park operations.

BACKGROUND: BOWA comprises 223.92 acres located in the rolling hills of the Virginia Piedmont, 22 miles south of Roanoke. The park contains a visitor center, administrative offices located within a former school building, an 1890s tobacco barn, reconstructed plantation outbuildings, two marked archeological sites, three small cemeteries and two walking trails that loop through the cabin area, meadows and woodlands. Twentieth-century replicas include a slave cabin, smoke house, blacksmith shop, privy, hog pen, duck lot, and chicken house. All replicas are highly conjectural, and their designs derive from anecdotal evidence and general historic precedent.

No replicas of the main plantation house or the birthplace cabin site exist. Archeological excavations in 1998 and 1999 confirmed the foundations of two structures. The larger one appears to have been a modest house; found within the perimeter of its foundation were artifacts that indicate a middle-class family lived there. The other was identified as a slave cabin based on its size and the artifacts uncovered. Washington said during his 1908 visit to his birthplace that this site contained the cabin he was born in. Based on the recent archeological and ethnographic research, which has been conducted largely independent of the other, there is still a question of where the “Big House” was. Was the larger foundation confirmed last year the location of the Burroughs’ Plantation house or did the “Big House” have a more prominent setting, about 200 yards to the north on a knoll overlooking the plantation, as some hypothesize (but without archeological evidence to date)?

The park as an entity and seven of its individual resources (the main plantation house site, the birthplace cabin site, the Burroughs Cemetery, the Sparks Cemetery, the Tobacco Barn and two road traces containing five separate sections) are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1856, Booker T. Washington was born into slavery on the site, which was then a small tobacco plantation owned by the Burroughs family. He lived there with his mother, sister and brother until the end of the Civil War and Emancipation. In 1865 Washington’s mother moved with her children to West Virginia to join her husband. Washington labored in a salt mine until he was 16, then journeyed 500 miles by himself with little money and no idea of what lay ahead to enroll in the Hampton Institute—an important step in his pursuit of an education. Washington excelled at Hampton. After receiving his degree, he worked for several years as a teacher in West Virginia before returning to Hampton to teach. In 1881 he was recommended by the principal of Hampton to develop a new school in Alabama – the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (later, Tuskegee University). Washington built Tuskegee, both literally and figuratively, into one of the premier educational institutions for African Americans in the United States.

Between 1895, when he delivered his famous speech at the Atlanta Exposition, and his death in 1915, he was arguably the most influential American in the areas of race relations and black education. He

served as an advisor to presidents, politicians, philanthropists and business leaders. He was not without critics, however. Some of his contemporaries felt that he made unforgivable compromises in accepting segregation while arguing for education and economic advancement for blacks, rather than advocating strongly for their political and social equality. Others felt that he worked within the constraints of his time to advocate for and achieve significant advances in the areas of education and economic empowerment for African Americans.

Washington was a complex individual who merits ongoing evaluation regarding his philosophies and actions. His early life as an enslaved child shaped much that he achieved and described throughout his life. The park offers fascinating opportunities for interpretation, resource protection and placing Washington within the larger and proper context of American history.

In 1940 Sidney Phillips, one of Washington's former students at Tuskegee, purchased the property comprising Washington's birthplace. Phillips developed the site as a memorial where he carried out a wide range of educational and promotional activities. In 1952 the trustees of the Booker T. Washington Birthplace donated six acres of land along the western boundary of the property for construction of a school – one of Franklin County's last segregated schools for black children. The school opened in 1954 and operated through 1966. The school, operating 100 years after Washington was freed from slavery, offers both physical and emotional links between Booker T. Washington and the continuing struggles of race and equality in America.

In 1956, Congress recognized the remainder of the site as the Booker T. Washington National Monument, and the NPS took responsibility for its administration. The site has been operated as a national monument since that date. In 1974, the NPS received through a donation from Franklin County, the six acres that included the segregated school building.

DECISION (SELECTED ACTION): The NPS will implement the proposed plan (selected action) as described in the Abbreviated Final Environmental Impact Statement released on January 21, 2000. The selected action is a revised version of Alternative C, which was the preferred alternative in the Draft GMP/EIS.

The selected action envisions the park working collaboratively with local, regional and national partner institutions to enhance protection of the park's cultural and natural resources and to create opportunities for outstanding and memorable visitor experiences that promote reflection, learning, and enjoyment related to the life and achievements of Booker T. Washington. Priorities for the selected action include the investigation and careful stewardship of the park's cultural, ethnographic, and natural resources; the expansion of the site's educational and interpretive offerings; and the preservation of the park's rural setting.

The goal of the selected action is to create a dynamic site that offers a changing menu of compelling educational programs. Resources will be managed in a way that enables the site to visually tell a compelling story. The park will not attempt to restore the entire site to one particular historic era, but rather will use available above- and below-ground resources to show the evolution of the site through

archeological investigation (past and future) and interpretive signage. Existing historic and reconstructed structures, including buildings and fences, will remain and be preserved through regular maintenance. Some reconstruction of cultural landscape features may be undertaken if sufficient documentation is found. A fifteen-acre boundary adjustment will be made at the northeast border of the park to include the remaining land from the Burroughs Plantation not currently within the park boundary.

Utilizing ongoing research and investigation of the site's resources, the park will be able to develop a rich repertoire of programs that will draw visitors of many ages time and again. Visitors will be exposed to different perspectives and will be able to explore different facets of Washington, his childhood and his birthplace.

An expansion of the existing visitor center will provide a venue where this information can be presented through exhibits and other special programs. The former Booker T. Washington Elementary School, which is currently used for offices, will be rehabilitated as a secondary venue for educational programs. The history of this building, which was constructed as a segregated school for black children provides an important link between the distant and more recent past.

Staffing levels will be increased to support the expanded research, interpretive and resource protection emphasis described in the selected action. Establishing new and stronger relationships with organizations involved in research, interpretation, education and resource protection associated with Washington and the preservation of the park's rural setting will be the focus of partnership efforts.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED: Three other alternatives were considered: Alternative A, the no action alternative, would maintain the current management approach at BOWA. Resource protection and visitor use opportunities would continue on their present course, with no new changes planned that would substantially enhance resource management or visitor programs and facilities. Cultural and natural resources would be maintained in their present condition. The present use of the cabin area for primary on-site interpretation; the visitor center for visitor orientation and information; and the former school building for administrative and maintenance purposes would continue.

Alternative B envisions the park as a national pilgrimage destination dedicated to commemorating the impact that Booker T. Washington had on American education and race relations. Park cultural and natural resources would be managed to maintain existing conditions and provide a contemplative setting appropriate for a commemorative park. The park boundary would remain unchanged.

Implementation of Alternative B would include creating an interpretive *Life Walk* representing Washington's achievements; rehabilitating and partially restoring the former segregated Booker T. Washington Elementary School as a full-scale visitor center; and creating an interactive library at the present visitor center. Cooperative efforts to maintain the park's viewshed, particularly along the western side of the park near the former school would be increased. New administrative and

maintenance facilities would be constructed. Circulation patterns within the park would be reoriented to bring visitors first to the former school, where they would begin their visit. Staffing levels would be increased to meet additional maintenance and programming requirements. Partnerships would focus on establishment of the *Life Walk* and maintaining the rural setting of the park and surrounding area.

Alternative D is a variation of the selected action. It also focuses on use of the site's resources to expand understanding of Washington's place in history. The key distinction is the rehabilitation and partial restoration of the former segregated school building and its establishment as the new visitor center. Rehabilitation and partial restoration of the former school would improve resource protection of the building and fully integrate this significant park resource into the interpretive program. The approach to resource management would otherwise be the same as described in the selected alternative. Recommendations regarding boundary are the same as in the selected action, although there would be increased attention to land development along the western boundary of the park, near the school building.

Alternative D also proposed new construction of a building (or relocating and reusing the current visitor center) near the school for park administrative functions and a new maintenance shop and yard in a site where it would not detract from visitor enjoyment. The new use of the school building would result in changes in existing circulation and visitor use patterns so that visitors began their tour of the park at the former school. Upon implementation of all other actions associated with this alternative, the present visitor center complex would be removed and the area restored consistent with the park's setting. Staffing levels would be increased to meet expanded research, interpretive, and programming requirements. Partnership opportunities would be pursued the same as in the selected action.

BASIS FOR DECISION: The Draft GMP/EIS for BOWA was developed over a two and one-half year period with meaningful public input. Factors considered in developing the alternatives and identifying a selected action include:

- the degree to which the park's purpose, significance, mission, and goals could be met;
- the degree to which the identified planning issues could be resolved;
- the degree to which necessary implementation actions could occur while mitigating/minimizing the associated environmental impacts; and
- the degree to which it could be feasible to implement an alternative taking into account costs, staffing and operational requirements, compliance requirements, and the needed support/cooperation of others.

The selected action for the Final GMP is a revised version of Alternative C, which was presented as the preferred alternative in the Draft GMP/EIS. The Draft GMP/EIS was released in June 1999. Subsequently, slight modifications to the preferred alternative were made in response to comments made during the public review period. The revised preferred alternative was presented in the Final GMP/Abbreviated Final EIS, published in January 2000, and is the subject of this Record of

Decision. The selected action best supports the park's purpose, significance and mission, while also providing management direction that best protects resources and offers high-quality visitor experiences.

Alternative A, the no action alternative, would not:

- fully achieve the park's mission and goals – there would be numerous deficiencies with respect to resource protection and visitor opportunities;
- address planning issues associated with the identified need for increased cultural and natural resource management, the adequacy of the park boundary and the associated need for viewshed protection, enhancing interpretive opportunities, providing adequate operational space, providing staffing to increase personal interaction with visitors and increase knowledge about Washington through historical research, and expand partnerships to better protect resources and provide enhanced interpretation; and
- mitigate or minimize environmental impacts associated with the park's current operational and management direction.

Alternative B would not:

- address planning issues associated with the adequacy of the park boundary and the associated need for viewshed protection, providing staffing to increase personal interaction with visitors, and expand partnerships to better protect resources;
- provide easy and convenient access between the primary orientation/interpretive facility (the current visitor center) and the core historic cabin area;
- minimize environmental impacts associated with ground disturbing activities – the Life Walk and the new circulation patterns associated with visitors arriving at the former school would create impacts not associated with the selected action; and
- demonstrate cost efficiencies, and would cost approximately 17% more than the selected action.

Alternative D would not:

- provide easy and convenient access between the primary orientation/interpretive facility (the current visitor center) and the core historic cabin area; and
- minimize environmental impacts associated with ground disturbing activities – the demolition of the current visitor center complex and the new circulation patterns associated with visitors arriving at the former school, would create impacts in alternative D not associated with the selected alternative.

In sum, the overall benefits of the selected action include:

- Expanded visitor facilities to effectively accommodate groups and other visitors;
- Flexible space that accommodates an increased number of exhibits, and allows for a range of interpretive and educational programs not currently available at the park;

- Access and interpretation of the former segregated school;
- Enhanced resource protection through increased commitments to research, investigation and management of the site's resources;
- Increased commitments to educational outreach and partnership building;
- Increased access throughout the park through expanded trails, waysides and other interpretive media;
- Use of existing park infrastructure where feasible, eliminating the need for reorienting vehicle circulation patterns and parking and minimizing new construction; and
- Adjustment of the park boundary to include protecting the remaining land that was part of Washington's birthplace.

MEASURES TO MINIMIZE IMPACTS AND ADDRESS PUBLIC CONCERNS: The environmental consequences of the selected action and the other alternatives were fully documented in the draft GMP/EIS and are summarized in the Final GMP/Abbreviated Final EIS. All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm that could result from the implementation of the selected action have been identified and incorporated as described in the Final GMP/Abbreviated Final EIS. Due to the programmatic nature of the plan, development projects will be reviewed as necessary for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and other applicable laws and regulations as soon as possible prior to project implementation. Actions to minimize impacts include using already disturbed areas as much as possible where development is planned, avoiding sensitive resources, using sustainable design techniques, mitigating resource damage through careful implementation planning procedures, phasing, timing, and other related actions.

The public review period for the Draft GMP/EIS ended on August 31, 1999. A number of substantial comments were addressed in the final plan. Public comment on the Draft GMP/EIS and NPS response is included in Section Four of the Final GMP/Abbreviated Final EIS. Most comments were favorable and supported the selected action. One new trail segment was eliminated because of potential ground disturbing impacts and public safety concerns.

The no-action period on the Final GMP/Abbreviated Final EIS ended on February 28, 2000, more than thirty (30) days after the publication of a notice of availability in the Federal Register.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE: The environmentally preferable alternative is the one that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment. It also means the alternative that best protects, preserves, and enhances the historic, cultural, and natural resources of the area where the proposed action is to take place. The selected action is the alternative that best fits these definitions.

Facility, circulation and trail improvements would focus on already disturbed lands and existing routes. New development would be limited to previously disturbed lands to the greatest extent possible. Site improvements would always focus on providing increased safety and environmental quality, while seeking to eliminate threats to park resources such as increasing soil erosion along

stream banks and its associated degradation of park hiking trails and water quality in its streams. Eliminating inappropriate uses in areas that contain sensitive cultural or natural resources such as archeological sites, cultural landscape features, or critical habitats would also be incorporated throughout plan implementation.

CONCLUSION: The above factors and considerations justify selection of the preferred action as described in the Final General Management Plan and Abbreviated Final Environmental Impact Statement for Booker T. Washington National Monument.

The NPS will continue to work with local, state and other federal officials, the general public, the private sector, and the Congress of the United States to implement the plan.

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