

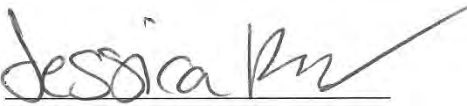


United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

DIRECTOR'S ORDER #42: ACCESSIBILITY OF NATIONAL PARK SERVICE FACILITIES, PROGRAMS, SERVICES, AND ACTIVITIES

Approved: 
Comptroller
Exercising the Delegated Authority of the Director

Effective Date: September 12, 2025

Duration: Until amended, superseded, or rescinded

This Director's Order (Order) supersedes and replaces Director's Order #42: Accessibility for Visitors with Disabilities, dated November 3, 2000. Together with Reference Manual 42 (RM-42), it supersedes and replaces any other conflicting guidance. This Order supplements policy guidance on accessibility for people with disabilities found in multiple sections of [NPS Management Policies \(2006\)](#).

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1. Background and Purpose

1.1. Background

Every year, millions of people visit America's national parks,¹ participate in National Park Service (NPS) programs, and use NPS digital content such as apps, websites, and social media. The NPS estimates that between 10 and 20 percent of its visitors have a disability.² And even more visitors have physical, cognitive, and sensory limitations that do not meet the legal definition of disability but that nonetheless could affect their experiences. Thus, millions of

¹ Annual visitation statistics are available at <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/index.htm>.

² This is a conservative figure based on U.S. Census Bureau and World Health Organization population estimates: over 40 million (13%) of the U.S. civilian, noninstitutionalized population and more than one billion (15%) of the world's population live with some form of disability.

people may face barriers to participating in the NPS's recreational opportunities, facilities, programs, activities, and services (visitor use opportunities) when they are not accessible.

There are legal, business, and ethical reasons for providing everyone with outstanding visitor experiences. More importantly, removing barriers to ensure accessible opportunities for people with disabilities is implicit in the NPS mission that all visitors be afforded access to the natural, cultural, and recreational resources and values we manage for their enjoyment, education, and inspiration.

The NPS also recognizes the need to consult with accessibility experts and representatives of the disability community to achieve its accessibility goals and objectives. Inaccessible facilities, programs, services, and activities put people with disabilities at risk and expose the NPS to complaints and lawsuits because accessibility is a life, health, and safety issue for people with disabilities. Further, a lack of accessible facilities, programs, services, and activities could result in billions of dollars in lost revenue to parks, partners, concessioners, and gateway communities.³

The NPS takes a proactive, accountable approach to accessibility that incorporates the principles of Universal Design and engages managers, employees, volunteers, concessioners, partners, and accessibility experts in the planning, development, operation, and maintenance of facilities, programs, services, and activities.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this Order is to provide more detailed interpretations of *Management Policies* related to accessibility for people with disabilities. It sets forth the operational policies and procedures and organizational capacity necessary for accessible:

- facilities
- transportation systems
- information and communication technology
- interpretive and educational programs and services
- museum collections and archives
- commercial visitor services

This Order also supports implementation of [Secretary's Order No. 3435](#), *Implementation of the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences Act* (SO 3435), specifically access improvements identified in section 5.c.

This Order applies to programs and activities conducted by the NPS and by organizations acting on behalf of the NPS, consistent with [43 CFR part 17](#).

For information about requirements related to reasonable accommodations for volunteers and employees see [Director's Order #16A: Reasonable Accommodation for Applicants and Employees with Disabilities](#) and [Director's Order #7: Volunteers-in-Parks](#).

RM-42 contains comprehensive requirements, procedures, and practices to carry out this Order.

³ Visitor spending contributes billions of dollars to the national economy annually. Refer to the NPS's annual reports on the effects of visitor spending at <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/index.htm>.

2. Authority to Issue this Director's Order

Authority to issue this Order is contained in the National Park Service Organic Act and other NPS laws ([54 USC 100101](#) *et seq.*), and the delegations of authority contained in [Part 245](#) of the Department of the Interior (DOI) Manual.

This Order is intended only to improve the internal management of the NPS and is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or equity by a party against the United States, its departments, agencies, instrumentalities or entities, its officers or employees, or any other person.

3. Applicable Laws, Regulations, and Standards

This section summarizes key Federal laws, regulations, policies, and standards on accessibility.

3.1 Accessibility Laws

- **Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (ABA)** ([42 USC 4151](#) *et seq.*) requires buildings or facilities designed, built, or altered with Federal funds, or leased by Federal agencies, be accessible to people with disabilities.
 - [Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards](#) contain design standards and technical requirements for accessibility to sites, facilities, buildings, and elements, and environments by people with disabilities. It includes provisions for outdoor developed areas (for example, trails, picnic and camping facilities, viewing areas, beach access routes, boating facilities, fishing piers and platforms, golf courses, and play areas).
- **Rehabilitation Act of 1973** ([29 USC 701](#) *et seq.*) prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in Federal employment and federally conducted programs and activities and programs and activities receiving Federal financial assistance.⁴ Sections of the Rehabilitation Act include:
 - [Section 504](#), which requires access to federally conducted programs and activities and to programs and activities receiving Federal financial assistance.
 - [Section 508](#), which requires Federal agencies to make their electronic and information and communications technology accessible to people with disabilities.
 - [Information and Communication Technology Standards](#), which provide technical standards for implementing section 508. DOI policy on section 508 ([375 DM 8](#)) provides guidance for DOI bureaus, including the NPS.
- **Great American Outdoors Act** ([Public Law 116-152](#)) establishes the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund. Funded projects must incorporate measures to improve accessibility and accommodate visitors and employees with disabilities.
- **Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences Act (EXPLORE Act)** ([Public Law 118-234](#)). Title II (Access America) directs Federal land management agencies to assess and expand recreation opportunities for people with disabilities.

⁴ Although title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) ([42 USC 12101](#) *et seq.*) does not apply to Federal agencies, section 504 and title II are interpreted consistently. Thus, given the parity between section 504 and title II of the ADA, this document sometimes refers to the requirements of title II.

3.2 Accessibility Regulations

- [36 CFR 1.2\(e\)](#)—NPS regulations treat people with mobility disabilities, who use a manual or motorized wheelchair, as pedestrians.
- [36 CFR 2.15\(a\)\(1\)](#)—NPS regulation restricting pets, with the exemption of guide dogs accompanying visually impaired people or hearing ear dogs accompanying hearing-impaired people.
- [41 CFR part 102-76, subpart C](#)—General Services Administration regulations adopting ABA accessibility standards.
- [43 CFR part 17](#)—DOI regulations for implementing section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. [Subpart B](#) applies to programs and activities that receive Federal financial assistance from DOI. [Subpart E](#) applies to programs and activities conducted, administered, or maintained by the DOI, its bureaus, and offices.

4. Definitions

Accessible and accessibility—visitors with disabilities can reach, use, understand, or appreciate programs, facilities, and services, and enjoy the same benefits that are available to people without disabilities.

Auxiliary Aids and Services—means devices or services that enable people with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills to have an equal opportunity to participate in, and enjoy the benefits of, NPS programs and activities.

Information and communication technology—computer hardware and software, facsimile machines, copiers, telephones, other equipment used for transmitting, receiving, using, or storing information, and all forms of digital content (public and internal websites, social media, and mobile apps).

Facilities—all or any portion of buildings, structures, equipment, roads, walks, parking lots, outdoor recreation and program spaces, park sites, developed sites, rolling stock or other conveyances, other real or personal property, and outdoor developed areas (such as trails, picnic and camping facilities, viewing areas, beach access routes, fishing piers and platforms, golf facilities, recreational boating facilities, and play areas).

Most Integrated Setting Possible—a setting that enables individuals with disabilities to interact with non-disabled people to the fullest extent possible. (See [28 CFR Part 35](#), [Appendix B](#), analysis of section 35.130.)

People with disabilities—individuals who have physical, mental, or sensory impairments that substantially limit one or more major life activities (for example, functions such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working); or have a record of such an impairment; or are regarded as having such an impairment.

Practicable or Feasible—capable of being done or put into practice. Practicable reflects not only what is possible to do, but also what is reasonable, after considering all of the consequences. Reasonable means the consequences do not result in a fundamental alteration in the nature of a visitor experience or place an undue financial and administrative burden on the NPS or the DOI.

Transportation system—an extensive network of transportation trails, transit systems, roads, bridges, and tunnels that respond to the access needs of a diverse set of visitors. The system includes all surface transportation assets and services that accommodate roadway, non-motorized, transit, and waterborne modes.

Universal Design—the design of products and environments to be usable by all people to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design, through application of the Seven Principles of Universal Design (Universal Design principles):

- Equitable use
- Flexibility in use
- Simple and intuitive use
- Perceptible information
- Tolerance for error
- Low physical effort
- Size and space for approach and use

Visitor—anyone who uses NPS facilities, transportation systems, information and communication technology, commercial services, or interpretive and educational programs and services, regardless of where such use occurs.

5. Management Policies

The following sections of [*Management Policies*](#) establish the policy framework for accessibility of NPS facilities, programs, services, and activities provided by the NPS and organizations acting on its behalf:

- [1.9.2 Managing Information](#) (Management Excellence)
- [1.9.3 Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities](#) (Management Excellence)
- [5.3.2 Physical Access for Persons with Disabilities](#) (Historic Properties)
- [6.4.10 Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities](#) (Wilderness Experiences)
- [7.5.2 Access to Interpretive and Educational Opportunities](#) (Requirements for All Interpretive and Educational Services)
- [8.2.4 Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities](#) (Visitor Use)
- [9.1.1 Facility Planning and Design](#)
- [9.1.2 Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities](#) (Visitor and Management Facilities)
- [9.2 Transportation Systems and Alternative Transportation](#)
- [9.2.2 Trails and Walks](#) (Transportation Systems and Alternative Transportation)
- [9.3 Visitor Facilities](#)
- [10.2.6.1 Design](#) (Concession Facilities)
- [10.2.6.2 Accessibility of Commercial Services](#) (Concession Facilities)

6. Accessibility of Visitor Use Opportunities Provided by the NPS

The NPS operates and maintains a large and complex range of visitor use opportunities, including facilities, transportation systems, information and communication technology, and interpretive and educational programs and services.

The NPS will design, construct, install, procure, operate, and maintain all visitor use opportunities and visitor experiences to ensure access for people with disabilities in the most integrated setting possible.

The NPS will develop or adopt accessibility requirements—accessibility codes, standards, and guidelines—for all visitor use opportunities. The accessibility requirements will:

- ensure communication with people with disabilities is equally effective as communication with people without disabilities;
- apply to new visitor use opportunities as soon as they are completed and made available to visitors;
- apply to the rehabilitation, replacement, or reasonable modification of existing visitor use opportunities;
- guide the choice and use of temporary, alternative methods of access to existing visitor use opportunities until they are made accessible, in consultation with NPS and external subject matter experts and representatives of the disability community;
- ensure compliance of all deliverables from organizations acting on behalf of the NPS for the design, construction, production, installation, procurement, maintenance, operation, and implementation before acceptance; and
- include a formal process for requesting and approving exceptions, exemptions, modifications to, and waivers of building codes from the agencies that have jurisdiction over those building codes.

7. Accessibility of Visitor Use Opportunities Provided by Organizations Acting on Behalf of the NPS

Many NPS federally conducted activities are delivered, administered, or maintained by government, nonprofit, and commercial organizations on behalf of the NPS. Therefore, this Order may, under certain circumstances, be applicable to:

- concessioners
- commercial use authorization (CUA) holders
- cooperating associations, outdoor schools in national parks, and other nonprofit partners
- permittees
- Federal, Tribal, State, or local government agencies
- contractors
- other entities with which the NPS has a contract or agreement

Organizations acting on behalf of the NPS must provide accessible visitor use opportunities. Therefore, the NPS will:

- require organizations, through the terms of contracts, CUAs, permits and agreements, to provide visitor use opportunities that comply with applicable accessibility requirements;
- ensure new contracts, CUAs, permits, and agreements specify the terms of compliance and how organizations will be held accountable; and
- ensure organizations have annual operating plans that specify how they will comply with and be held accountable for meeting applicable accessibility requirements.

For more information, see [Director's Order #20: Agreements](#), [Director's Order #32: Cooperating Associations](#) and [Reference Manual 32](#), and [Commercial Services Guide, National Park Service Commercial Services Program](#).

8. Accessibility in NPS Policies, Procedures, and Practices

Federal law requires the NPS to make sure its policies, procedures, and practices, whether formal or informal, do not create barriers to access or increase burdens on people with disabilities. Further, the NPS must ensure employees (both those of the NPS and those of organizations acting on behalf of the NPS) do not make decisions or take actions that create barriers for or increase burdens on people with disabilities.

8.1 Review of Policies and Procedures

NPS accessibility subject matter experts will review new and existing NPS policies and procedures that may affect visitors and employees with disabilities to ensure they do not create barriers or add burdens for visitors with disabilities. Subject matter experts will consult with the disability community as necessary and allowable.

Accessibility subject matter experts must be consulted to ensure accessibility requirements are integrated into new and updated NPS policies and procedures. The responsible directorate or program office will (1) include an accessibility subject matter expert on the policy development work group, or (2) obtain formal and informal feedback from accessibility subject matter experts at key points in the policy development process.

8.2 Use of Service Animals by People with Disabilities

Per [Policy Memorandum 18-02](#) service animals must be allowed wherever visitors are allowed when accompanying a person with a disability, unless the service animal:

- is not housebroken; or
- is out of control and the animal's handler does not take effective action to control it.

A service animal means any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. The NPS must make reasonable modifications to its policies, practices, and procedures to permit use of a miniature horse by an individual with a disability, if the miniature horse has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the individual's benefit. See section 8.5 for information about service animals in wilderness areas.

RM-42 will provide more information and guidance.

8.3 Use of Mobility Aids and Devices by People with Disabilities

The NPS and organizations acting on its behalf must allow people with disabilities who use manual or power wheelchairs and other mobility aids (such as walkers, crutches, canes, and braces) into all areas where members of the public are allowed to go. The term "wheelchair" is defined as a manually operated or power-driven device designed primarily for use by an individual with a mobility disability for the main purpose of indoor or of both indoor and outdoor

locomotion ([28 CFR 35.104](#)). This definition does not apply to Federal wilderness areas; wheelchairs in such areas are defined in section 508(c)(2) of the ADA ([42 USC 12207\(c\)\(2\)](#)).

The NPS and organizations acting on its behalf must also allow people with disabilities who use other power-driven mobility devices (OPDMD) into their facilities unless a particular type of device cannot be accommodated because of legitimate safety requirements. Where legitimate safety requirements bar accommodation for a particular type of device, the NPS or organizations acting on its behalf must offer the program or activity in alternate ways. The NPS and organizations acting on its behalf will follow [guidance for OPDMDs](#) issued by the Department of Justice under the ADA.

The NPS will implement title II of the EXPLORE Act and SO 3435 to ensure trails and other recreation facilities are accessible to users of mobility devices. See section 8.5 for more information about use of mobility aids and devices in wilderness areas.

8.4 Provision of Auxiliary Aids and Services

Visitors with disabilities can request that the NPS provide auxiliary aids and services. To ensure visitors with disabilities know how to request them, superintendents must:

- use a variety of communication methods to give information and instructions to the public; and
- issue standard operating procedures to guide employees in responding to these requests.

Organizations acting on behalf of the NPS are subject to the same auxiliary aids and services requirements as the NPS. The NPS is not responsible for arranging or funding auxiliary aids and services that visitors request from these organizations.

See RM-42 for detailed information and guidance about the provision of auxiliary aids and services, including what constitutes reasonable notice.

8.5 Access to Wilderness Areas

The NPS is committed to providing people with disabilities opportunities for appropriate enjoyment of wilderness areas as defined in [Director's Order #41: Wilderness Stewardship](#).

The NPS will allow service animals in wilderness when their use is required, unless the service animal presents a legitimate safety concern or would fundamentally alter the nature of the good, service, program, or activity. The training of service animals in wilderness may be allowed if it does not negatively impact wilderness character and only in areas specifically designated for pets by the park superintendent.

Wheelchairs (whether manually operated or power-driven) are allowed in wilderness if they meet the definition in section 508(c)(2) of the ADA (42 USC 12207(c)(2)): "...a device designed solely for use by a mobility-impaired person for locomotion that is suitable for use in an indoor pedestrian area."

The NPS is not required to provide any form of special treatment or accommodation, or to construct any facilities or modify any condition of lands within a wilderness area to facilitate the use of mobility aids and devices.

See Director's Order #41, [Reference Manual 41](#), and RM-42 for more information and guidance.

8.6 Prevention and Correction of Barriers and Burdens to Access

To prevent or correct practices or actions by NPS employees and employees of organizations acting on behalf of the NPS that create access barriers or increase burdens for visitors with disabilities, the NPS will:

- take proactive measures to prevent practices, situations, and behaviors that result in barriers and burdens for people with disabilities;
- ensure that people with disabilities understand how to inform the NPS of perceived barriers and burdens;
- implement an effective, efficient, and unbiased process for receiving, investigating, and resolving complaints from visitors about barriers and burdens; and
- take timely and effective corrective action when barriers or burdens are confirmed.

9. Organizational Support for Accessibility

Sustaining the NPS's commitment to providing accessible opportunities for visitors requires the support of managers, employees, and volunteers throughout the organization, as well as by organizations acting on its behalf. To increase organizational support for accessibility, the NPS will:

- organize and maintain a Service-wide Advisory Group to advise NPS leadership on emerging issues and the needs of parks and programs related to accessibility;
- provide learning and development opportunities related to accessibility; and
- use a variety of communication methods to share information about accessibility with employees and the public.

10. Roles and Responsibilities

Ensuring access to NPS facilities, programs, services, and activities is a broad-based, multidisciplinary responsibility that is shared across every level of the organization. Specific roles and responsibilities are outlined as follows.

10.1 Director and Deputy Directors

The Director and Deputy Directors will:

- provide Service-wide leadership on accessibility;
- support training, technical assistance, and other activities that will improve access for visitors with disabilities and prevent and correct instances of increasing barriers or burdens for visitors with disabilities; and
- review and acknowledge in writing recommendations of the Service-wide Accessibility Advisory Group.

10.2 Associate Director, Park Planning, Facilities and Lands

The Associate Director, Park Planning, Facilities, and Lands will:

- issue, and update as necessary, RM-42, with appropriate input from associate, assistant, and regional directors; and
- establish and maintain a team of NPS subject matter experts to coordinate and advance accessibility activities Service-wide.

10.2.1 Service-wide Accessibility Team

This team will:

- lead implementation of this Order;
- lead implementation of SO 3435's key area on accessibility;
- collaborate with associate, assistant, and regional directors on the development of RM-42 and the development and integration of accessibility policies and responsibilities into relevant Level 2 (Director's Orders) and Level 3 (reference manuals, handbooks, etc.) policies, procedures, and practices;
- coordinate the Service-wide Accessibility Advisory Group, which represents the accessibility needs of NPS directorates and regions and their respective programs, offices, and parks;
- provide learning and development opportunities about accessibility and disability;
- provide technical assistance to NPS managers and employees to:
 - enhance awareness about accessibility; and
 - prevent and correct barriers or burdens to accessibility for visitors with disabilities.
- engage with organizations that represent the disability community and other Federal agencies with disability programs to gather and share information about NPS accessibility goals and objectives, best practices, including the work of the Service-wide Accessibility Advisory Group.

10.2.2 Service-wide Accessibility Advisory Group

This is an internal, NPS group that includes representatives from directorates, regions, and parks. The advisory group will:

- provide advice and make recommendations about training and technical assistance needs of NPS directorates, regions, and parks;
- disseminate information about accessibility to NPS managers and employees using various communication channels;
- collaborate with other NPS stakeholder groups to advance accessibility goals and objectives; and
- provide written recommendations to the Director and Deputy Director(s) for improving how the NPS meets the needs of visitors with disabilities.

10.3 Associate, Assistant, and Regional Directors

Associate, assistant, and regional directors have leadership responsibilities for Service-wide implementation of this Order and SO 3435. They will:

- coordinate and collaborate with each other, superintendents, program managers, and other senior leaders to advance accessibility;

- adopt or develop accessibility competencies and ensure employees have access to training to support these competencies;
- collaborate and coordinate with the Service-wide Accessibility Team to:
 - develop chapters of RM-42 relevant to their respective responsibilities;
 - develop and integrate accessibility for visitors and employees and associated responsibilities into relevant Level 2 and Level 3 policies, procedures, and practices; and
 - provide employee training to develop and maintain accessibility competencies.
- have accessibility subject matter experts review new and existing policies to make sure they do not create barriers or burdens for visitors with disabilities;
- ensure programs and activities have the necessary funds, personnel, supplies, and equipment to implement the policies, procedures, and standards in this Order and RM-42;
- ensure NPS managers, employees, volunteers, and organizations acting on behalf of the NPS have access to timely information about accessibility;
- ensure projects and activities funded, reviewed, coordinated, or implemented under their purview incorporate accessibility requirements; and
- appoint representatives to the Service-wide Accessibility Advisory Group from those nominated by program offices under their purview.

10.4 Superintendents

Superintendents will:

- ensure visitor use opportunities are accessible to people with disabilities;
- identify an accessibility point of contact who can coordinate with the Service-wide Accessibility Team as necessary;
- ensure park staff have the opportunity to receive the training and information necessary to make visitor use opportunities accessible and to not create barriers to visitors with disabilities;
- issue and maintain park-specific instructions, standard operating procedures, directives, and other guidance to ensure accessibility and hold employees and organizations acting on behalf of the NPS accountable;
- ensure funded projects have sufficient scope and funding to comply with accessibility requirements;
- ensure contracts, CUAs, and agreements with organizations acting on behalf of the NPS or providing deliverables to the NPS specify the need to comply with accessibility requirements and methods for addressing non-compliance; and
- provide the public with accurate, up-to-date information about the accessibility of visitor use opportunities.

11. Related Sources of Guidance

[Policy Memorandum 18-02: Use of Service Animals by Visitors with Disabilities – Interim Policy](#)
[Director’s Order #2: Park Planning](#) and [Reference Manual 2](#)
[Director’s Order #6: Interpretation and Education](#)
[Director’s Order #7: Volunteers-in-Parks](#) and [Reference Manual 7](#)
[Director’s Order #16A: Reasonable Accommodation for Applicants and Employees with Disabilities](#)

[Director's Order #17: National Park Service Tourism](#)
[Director's Order #20: Agreements](#)
[Director's Order #24: NPS Museum Collections Management](#) and [Museum Handbook](#)
[Director's Order #26: Youth Programs](#)
[Director's Order #28: Cultural Resource Management, NPS-28, and Preservation Brief 32: Making Historic Properties Accessible](#)
[Director's Order #32: Cooperating Associations](#) and [Reference Manual 32](#)
[Director's Order #36: NPS Housing Management](#) and [Reference Manual 36](#)
[Director's Order #41: Wilderness Stewardship](#) and [Reference Manual 41](#)
[Director's Order #70: Governance and Management of the National Park Service Digital Experience](#)
[Director's Order #75A: Civic Engagement and Public Involvement](#)
[Director's Order #80: Real Property Asset Management](#)
[Director's Order #90: Value Analysis](#)
[Commercial Services Guide, National Park Service Commercial Services Program](#)

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