



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Director's Order #52A: Communicating the National Park Service Mission

Approved: 
Acting Director

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I. Background and Purpose

The world has changed profoundly since the late 19th century when the first national parks were created. These changes have challenged the National Park Service to assume responsibilities never anticipated when the agency was established in August 1916. It is no longer sufficient to look only within the boundaries of a park when making management decisions. Parks are part of broader communities; actions in parks affect their communities just as actions in communities affect parks.

Park management is more complex, and there are more parks to manage. The National Park System has experienced phenomenal growth in recent years, with the addition of more than 100 new parks since 1973. These include new kinds of parks complete with new kinds of challenges—such as urban recreation areas, free-flowing rivers, long distance trails, heritage areas, and historic sites that affirm the nation's social achievements, triumphs, and tragedies. Both within

and beyond park boundaries, partnership activities have become enormously important to the Service. We rely increasingly on partner organizations to enhance our ability to accomplish our mission, a mission that has expanded to help tribal, State, and local governments protect local riverways, trails, and historic sites and structures, and to develop recreation facilities. Our mission—both in 1916 and today—has been entrusted to us by the American public. We have a fundamental responsibility to ensure that the public understands and supports what we do on their behalf.

Our Opportunity for Improvement. As the challenges of our mission grow, so must our efforts to communicate this mission to the American people. In partnership with the National Park Foundation, the Service engaged in an effort to better understand the American public’s perception of national parks and the mission of the National Park Service. As part of this effort—referred to as the “Message Project”—research was conducted under the auspices of the Foundation throughout the country and across a diverse spectrum of the American population. While we found a genuine appreciation for national parks, we found little understanding of the depth and breadth of the National Park System, and even less awareness of the mission of the National Park Service outside of parks.

As employees of the National Park Service, we take great pride in the work we perform, in the uniform we wear, in the programs we administer, and in what the Arrowhead Symbol stands for. We know that parks are more than camping, and that our mission is more than parks. But we can do better at sharing this knowledge with the people who own these parks and who gave us our mission more than 80 years ago—the American public. If we are to truly play a much more significant role as an educational resource for the American people, we must excel in communicating our mission clearly and effectively. The public will be most supportive of our mission if they have a greater knowledge of what we do. They will better understand our management decisions if we more clearly and thoroughly explain why the places we care for are special. We will be most successful in accomplishing our mission if we invite the public to be our partners in stewardship.

To enhance the public’s understanding of what we are and what we do, we must significantly improve our ability to deliver to all segments of society high quality, useful information that paves the way to knowledge and understanding and invites support for, and participation in, the NPS mission. An analysis of how we currently communicate information identified several barriers to a richer public understanding, and a strategy for improvement has been developed. The National Leadership Council has endorsed the strategy and recommendations and—with this Director’s Order—we will now begin taking the steps necessary to ensure their successful implementation.

Our Commitment. This Director’s Order formalizes our commitment to this strategy and summarizes how we will implement it. In some cases, we will have to change the way we do things. When the change can take place immediately, we will do so. (Indeed, significant progress has already been made on graphic design standards, the newsletter, and the NPS website.) When the change cannot take place immediately, we will change incrementally.

The strategy outlined in this order focuses on steps we must take to build on the traditions that have shaped the National Park Service. Those who know the Service know the passion and commitment that Service employees have for our mission. Our goal is to instill that passion and

commitment in a much broader segment of the American people. By doing this, we will ensure that more people understand and support the full scope of the work the Service performs in protecting America's most treasured places—both directly through the national parks, and indirectly through programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund and National Historic Landmarks.

Desired Results. Applying this strategy to everything we do—from developing in-park interpretive programs, to explaining the goals of the Natural Resource Challenge, to creating a brochure on the National Register of Historic Places, to strengthening our presence on the Internet—will increase our ability to communicate effectively with the American public. These are the tools that will help us continue to nurture an organizational culture that treats the public as stakeholders in the special places we manage and in our mission. Strengthening the connection between the American public and the mission of the National Park Service will help build a sense of ownership and pride in these places. With understanding and ownership comes a commitment to their stewardship.

Success will mean a public with a better awareness of the breadth and depth of their national parks; a public that understands and values the work of the NPS in parks and communities; a public with the knowledge to become better users and stewards of the special places they have entrusted to our care; and a public that understands how NPS partnership programs extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.

II. Authority for Issuing this Director's Order

This Director's Order is issued under the authority of the NPS Organic Act (16 USC 1 through 4), and delegations of authority found in Part 245 of the Department of the Interior Manual. This is the first in a series of four inter-related Director's Orders aimed at helping us improve the public's understanding of the NPS mission. The other three are:

- #52B: Graphic Design Standards
- #52C: Park Signage
- #52D: Use of the Arrowhead Symbol

Other Director's Orders that have an important bearing on this subject matter include Director's Order #43: Uniform Program; #70: Internet and Intranet Usage; and #75: Media Relations.

III. Implementation Actions and Responsibilities

The implementation actions listed below are accompanied by a designation of those who have lead responsibility. This by no means suggests that these are the only people or offices who will play a role in developing the necessary follow-up documents or in implementing the processes and changes that will be necessary. In many cases, the leader will need to form a team to address the immediate tasks at hand. At the very least, the leader will seek the counsel of all others who will have significant implementation responsibilities. For example, the Harpers Ferry Center will play a lead role in developing Director's Order #52C: Park Signage, and the Park Facility Management Division will be a key contributor. But Denver Service Center and park sign coordinators will also be consulted.

A. Communications Coordination. A senior-level WASO Communications Coordinator position will be established to provide overall development and coordination of an external and internal communications strategy to be implemented at all levels and across all branches of our organization. The incumbent will not have line authority, but will have broad functional authority to coordinate among all branches of our organization and expedite achievement of the improvements and desired results described in section 1, above. The Communications Coordinator will report to the Deputy Director having responsibility for Service operations.

Lead responsibility: Director.

B. Field Responsibility. Success for the overall program requires support and full cooperation from all levels of our organization; program managers, regional directors, superintendents, and employees. Regional directors and superintendents are responsible for implementation of this order in their areas of responsibility. They are expected to provide proactive leadership consistent with the directions and philosophy expressed in this order, and in consultation and coordination with the Communications Coordinator, in all subject areas listed below. Regions and parks are expected to operate and staff for proactive communications responsibilities.

C. Arrowhead Symbol. The NPS Arrowhead Symbol is registered as a service mark with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Its use is controlled through law, regulation, and policies issued by the Director. Non-NPS uses—and some NPS uses—require prior approval by the Director. The Arrowhead Symbol as published on www.graphics.nps.gov is approved as the official symbol of the National Park Service, and it will be incorporated into Director's Order #52B and related guidance materials.

To help achieve the purposes of this order, the Arrowhead Symbol will appear on all official NPS media intended for the public, consistent with the graphic design standards prescribed by Director's Order #52B (see section III.E, below). It will be used in all new publications immediately, and will be applied to all existing publications as they are updated. It will be the symbol of the Service used on signs, business cards, letterhead, and other materials or media that require the use of a Service symbol. It will also be applied as soon as practicable to all new orders for official uniforms and other approved clothing.

In the case of uniforms and similar applications, there will be a reasonable transition period during which both the original and the modified Arrowhead Symbol may continue to be used until the items with the original Arrowhead Symbol are replaced; but all new orders will stipulate the use of the modified design as soon as the necessary production capabilities are in place.

Director's Order #52B will prescribe the manner in which the words "United States Department of the Interior" will be applied in conjunction with the Arrowhead Symbol.

Lead responsibility: Harpers Ferry Center.

General policy governing the full spectrum of who may use the Arrowhead Symbol and how it may be used in support of NPS educational and conservation objectives will be addressed in Director's Order #52D: Use of the Arrowhead Symbol, which will update and revise the policies and procedures contained in Special Directive 93-7 (Use of the NPS Arrowhead Symbol).

Lead responsibility: WASO Office of Policy.

D. Uniforms. The NPS uniform that we take such pride in is a strong means of expressing the public identity of our agency. Director's Order #43: Uniform Program, and its accompanying reference manual prescribe appropriate standards for uniformed employees. Unless it is determined by the superintendent that wearing the uniform is inadvisable at a specific function, any uniformed employee serving as an NPS spokesperson or representing the NPS at a public event will do so in uniform. Additional guidance will be developed for any non-uniformed employee serving as a Service representative or spokesperson at a public event. (See also paragraph C, above, regarding the application of the newly adopted Arrowhead Symbol to the NPS uniform.)

Lead responsibility: Associate Director, Park Operations and Education.

E. Graphic Design. Graphic design standards for all NPS media will be developed to bring a consistent look to NPS materials. Policy applicable to these standards will be issued through Director's Order #52B: Graphic Design Standards, and will be mandatory. The policy will address how the Arrowhead Symbol, the copyrighted phrase "Experience Your America," and any other graphics-related requirements will be used in publications and other materials. The Director's Order will be accompanied by a "Level 3" reference manual and Web materials containing the actual standards and easy-to-use templates and prototypes. Standards will be maintained both in hard copy and on www.graphics.nps.gov.

Lead responsibility: Harpers Ferry Center.

F. Park Signage. Standards for park signage will be addressed in Director's Order #52C, and will be consistent with the graphic design standards developed under Director's Order #52B. The intent will be to bring a consistent look to park signs System-wide. The Arrowhead Symbol will be used on all new signs in accordance with Director's Order #52B. Existing sign stocks may be used until exhausted and replaced. Nothing in this policy will affect the continued use and display of entrance signs that have historic significance to a park.

Lead responsibility: Harpers Ferry Center.

G. Contextual Design. One of the most profound ways in which the Service conveys its message is in the way it plans, designs, constructs, and maintains park facilities. In accordance with the 2001 edition of *NPS Management Policies*, the Service will lead by example. The Service will not develop, or re-develop, a facility within a park until a determination has been made that the facility is necessary and appropriate, and that it would not be practicable for the facility to be developed, or the service provided, outside the park. Park buildings, roads, and other development that is necessary and appropriate will be integrated into the park landscape and environs with sustainable designs and systems to minimize environmental impact. Development will not compete with or dominate park features, or interfere with natural processes.

Lead responsibility: Associate Director, Professional Services.

H. Content of Informational Materials and Programs. Materials and programs produced for individual parks and programs will include language that relates the park or program to the System, the Service, and/or thematically or geographically linked parks and programs. The language will help the public make connections between parks and programs and better comprehend the scope of NPS activities.

Lead responsibility: All parks and offices that produce informational materials and programs.

To invite the public to share in our stewardship mission, we will:

- Talk with the public in a way that makes clear we are protecting places “for” them rather than “from” them.
- Explain NPS stewardship in a way the public can understand and that invites the public to participate both in parks and in their own communities.
- Use plain language to connect with the American people; eliminate jargon.
- Revise, as necessary, all brochures, exhibits, waysides, interpretive programs, and other materials as they are replaced, reprinted, or revised.

Lead responsibility: The new WASO Communications Coordinator.

Materials will be developed with “tracks” for visitors (families with young children, seniors, history buffs, etc.) to address the specific needs of visitors.

Lead responsibility: The new WASO Communications Coordinator.

I. Newsletter. The Service will partner with the Employees and Alumni Association of the National Park Service (E&AA) to re-design the E&AA quarterly newsletter as the “ARROW-HEAD” and provide it to all NPS employees. This will reinforce employees’ connection to the system/Service and improve our ability to share best practices and learn from each other. Other mechanisms, including the National Leadership Council Journal and the Director’s Bulletin Board, will be used to improve communication of important issues Service-wide.

Lead responsibility: The new WASO Communications Coordinator.

J. Conferences. Connections will be strengthened and Service-wide priorities will be shared by including mutually agreed upon common agenda items for discussion at all annual regional conferences (superintendents, interpreters, maintenance, etc.).

Lead responsibility: The new WASO Communications Coordinator.

K. External Communications. To enhance our ability to reach the public with National Park Service information, every park and program will have, or have access to (through the regional director’s office or WASO Communications), trained public affairs staff. Core competencies already developed for these positions will be adopted. A regional and national network of public affairs staff will be established. Training and tools for all frontline personnel will be offered.

Lead responsibility: The new WASO Communications Coordinator.

L. National Park Service Website. The NPS website will be upgraded and kept current to meet the needs of the public and the Service, in accordance with Director's Order #70. It will take advantage of new technologies and opportunities as they become available to deliver the most accurate, comprehensive and current information available about parks, programs, and resources. National program managers, park/regional web coordinators, Web authors, and producers at all levels must coordinate their efforts to ensure that the Service's presence on the Web has a consistent look and consistently high quality. Every effort will be made to establish, as appropriate, public and private partnerships that strengthen the NPS Internet program. (An example of a successful partnership is the National Parks Pass system, jointly developed and managed by the NPS and the National Park Foundation.)

Lead responsibility: The Information and Telecommunications Center.

M. Partners. The Service recognizes that working with partner organizations greatly enhances its ability to protect park resources and to provide educational and other visitor services both within parks and beyond park boundaries. Therefore, the Service will continue to pursue, nurture, and welcome the assistance that partner organizations are so uniquely suited to provide. The effectiveness of the Service and its partners can be enhanced through better coordination and consistency in the "messages" that are communicated to the public.

Lead responsibility: The new WASO Communications Coordinator. (The Service's relationship with the National Park Foundation—and the Proud Partner program—will continue to be within the purview of the Partnership Office.)

N. Organizational Statements. A simple, clear, one sentence statement has been developed: "The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage." In addition, the phrase "Experience Your America" has been copyrighted by the National Park Foundation for use by the National Park Service. Both are tools to help us clearly communicate with the public. Standards for their use will be issued in conjunction with Director's Order #52B.

Beyond this statement and phrase, a series of organizational statements has been developed as a tool to help bridge the gap between what we are and what the public thinks we are. The statements were developed through workshops involving more than 300 NPS employees and NPS partners. These were held in every region of the NPS, as well as with Washington staff, in early 1999. These statements represent in broad strokes and clear and concise language what we want the public to understand about the parks and the mission of the National Park Service, and should be used to frame communications at every appropriate opportunity.

- **Parks Reflect America:** National parks should be an honest, accurate and comprehensive reflection of the diversity of American culture, history, and landscapes.
- **Parks As Libraries:** The National Park Service should offer a lifelong interactive education by serving as a repository of places, things, and ideas, and making them available to teach children and adults about themselves, their communities, and their surroundings.

- **Parks Are a Legacy:** National parks are a gift from past generations that we should preserve for future generations.
- **Parks Are Real:** National parks are special because they are authentic and irreplaceable, which should make them more valuable, more enjoyable, and more educational than a reproduction.
- **Parks Tell Amazing Stories:** The National Park Service should tell the story of human history and natural sciences that together equal modern day America.
- **Parks Are an American Idea:** The idea of national parks was created in the United States and carried by the National Park Service to nations throughout the world.
- **Preservation Matters:** Preserving what we value improves us as individuals, citizens, and communities, and as a people, and the National Park Service should be a leader in promoting preservation.
- **Parks Belong to All Americans:** National parks belong to all Americans, so all Americans should feel welcome to experience parks.
- **The National Park Service Is a Part of the American Community:** The National Park Service should partner with local communities to promote preservation, recreation, and the ideals embodied in parks.
- **Parks Need Resources:** Like anything else of value, the future of national parks depends on support; they will require resources—in the form of money, time, and effort—from all Americans in order to thrive.
- **Parks are to be Enjoyed and Preserved:** People will always be able to enjoy parks, but in ways that will preserve and protect the parks for the future.
- **Parks Can be Experienced In Many Forms:** People should experience national parks—for enjoyment, education, and enrichment—in many ways, not just by visiting.
- **Parks Are a Historical Link:** National parks should represent a link between our past, our present, and our future.
- **The National Park Service Is Credible:** Employees of the National Park Service should be passionate, credible, dedicated stewards of resource preservation and protection.

Lead responsibility: The new WASO Communications Coordinator.

-----End of Director's Order-----