

8.10 Natural and Cultural Studies, Research, and Collection Activities

Studies, research, and collection activities by non-NPS personnel involving natural and cultural resources will be encouraged and facilitated when they otherwise comport with NPS policies. Scientific activities that involve field work or specimen collection, or that have the potential to disturb resources, the visitor experience, or park operations, require a permit issued by the superintendent that prescribes appropriate conditions for protecting park resources, visitors, and operations. Such studies may require additional permits from other jurisdictions.

(See Studies and Collections 4.2; Independent Research 5.1.2; Independent and Commercial Studies 8.11.3)

8.11 Social Science Studies

8.11.1 General

Understanding the changing demographics of our nation is critical to the future of the National Park Service. The Park Service will actively seek to better understand the values and connections the changing U.S. population has, or does not have, for our natural and cultural heritage so that the Service can be responsive and relevant to public needs and desires. This includes understanding why people do or do not visit national parks.

The National Park Service will facilitate social science studies that support the NPS mission by providing an understanding of park visitors, the nonvisiting public, gateway communities and regions, and human interactions with park resources. This approach will provide a scientific basis for park planning, development, operations, management, education, and interpretive activities. Investigators will be encouraged to use the parks for scientific studies whenever such use is consistent with NPS policies that recognize the scientific value of parks as laboratories. Specific guidance is provided in Director's Orders #75A: Civic Engagement and Public Involvement, and #78: Social Science.

Studies include short- or long-term scientific investigations in NPS areas that may involve social science surveys and research. The data and information acquired through scientific activities conducted in the parks will be made broadly available to park managers, the scientific community, and the public, except where legal restrictions apply. Studies may include both internally and externally conducted projects by researchers and scholars with universities; foundations and other nongovernmental organizations; federal, state and local agencies; chambers of commerce; industry organizations; and NPS staff. The Park Service will promote cooperative relationships with educational and scientific institutions and qualified individuals (1) when specialized expertise exists that can be of significant assistance to the Service in obtaining information, and (2) when the opportunity for research and study in the parks offers institutions a significant benefit to their programs. NPS facilities and assistance may be

made available to qualified researchers conducting NPS-authorized studies. NPS or other federally funded studies that rely on survey instruments or focus groups are strictly regulated and must be approved by the Park Service, the Department of the Interior, and the Office of Management and Budget before they can be used to gather information directly from visitors or the general public.

(See Managing Information 1.9.2; Studies and Collections 4.2; Research 5.1, Planning 5.2; Appropriate Use 8.1.1; Special Park Uses 8.6; NPS-supported Studies 8.11.2; Independent and Commercial Studies 8.11.3; Department of the Interior Interim Guidelines for Collection of Information from the Public. Also see Director's Order #17: Tourism)

8.11.2 NPS-supported Studies

The National Park Service is responsible for the identification and acquisition of needed inventory, monitoring, and research, as well as for the interpretation of the management and operational implications of such studies. The Service will use the best available science to assist park managers in addressing management needs and objectives that have been identified in legislation and planning documents.

The Service will support studies to

- ◆ reach a level of understanding that will minimize "crisis" management;
- ◆ ensure a systematic and fully adequate park information base;
- ◆ provide a sound basis for policy, planning, and decision-making;
- ◆ develop effective strategies, methods, and technologies to predict, avoid, or minimize unacceptable impacts on resources, visitors, and related activities;
- ◆ determine causes of resource management problems;
- ◆ further understand park ecosystems and related human social systems, and document their components, condition, and significance;
- ◆ evaluate visitor satisfaction with services, facilities, and recreational opportunities;
- ◆ ensure that the interpretation of park resources and issues reflects current standards of scholarship for the history, science, and condition of the resources;
- ◆ evaluate performance measures in support of strategic plan goals;
- ◆ establish economic measures and impact indicators of interest or importance;
- ◆ improve understanding of local, regional, and national demographics and trends.

Superintendents may authorize park staff to carry out routine duties without requiring a research/collecting permit. NPS-supported research will rely on high-quality methods and undergo peer review. NPS-supported scientists will be expected to publish their findings in refereed journals, among other outlets.