



## Water Resources Planning Program

### Background

The Water Resources Division (WRD) Planning Program provides parks with comprehensive planning services/products, covering the full spectrum of water resources that will assist in their efforts to achieve or maintain water resource integrity.

Water is a particularly important and sensitive ecosystem component, and it plays a central role in the social, economic, environmental, and political mosaic of units of the national park system. Its physical availability and quality are critical determinants of a park's overall natural resource condition. Because of the important role of water in maintaining resource condition, it is the policy of the NPS to maintain, rehabilitate, and perpetuate the inherent natural integrity of water resources and water-dependent environments occurring within the national park system.

The management of the national park system is directed by federal law, NPS policy, and park planning, in that order. Planning is a decision-making process that helps managers determine the best way to comply with law and policy in those instances where management discretion is allowed, and the best way to address the many competing interests in parks that are not directly addressed by law or policy.

Presently overall park planning is guided by the [Park Planning Program Standards](#) issued in 2004 (Figure 1). These standards provide a logical flow established through several levels of planning that become increasingly detailed and complementary by agreeing first on why a park was established and what resource conditions should exist and then increasingly focused on how those conditions should be maintained or achieved.

The NPS Water Resources Planning Program has reacted to these planning standards by offering a new generation of planning products and support to parks designed to integrate into specific elements of the park planning framework (Figure 1, next page).

### Highlights and Accomplishments

#### *New Generation Products*

A [Water Resources Foundation Report](#) is designed to address the needs of a park's Foundation for Planning and Management document, the now formalized precursor to the General Management Plan (GMP) (Figure 1). The primary objectives of the Water Resources Foundation Report are to: 1) synthesize information on the existing conditions of the park's water resources; 2) identify and describe the park's fundamental and/or important water

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Less than 10 percent of NPS units with significant water resources have any type of aquatic resource specialist. (Photo credit: Steve Moore, Great Smoky Mountains National Park)

### Program Links (Click Links Below for Additional Information)

[Water Resources Planning Fact Sheet](#)  
[Water Resources Scoping Report](#)  
[Water Resources management Plans](#)  
[Water Resource Issues Overviews](#)  
[Draft Director's Order 2.1: Resource Stewardship Planning](#)

**Water Resources Planning Reports (sorted by Region)**  
[Alaska](#); [Intermountain](#); [Midwest](#); [National Capital](#);  
[Northeast](#); [Pacific West](#); [Southeast](#)

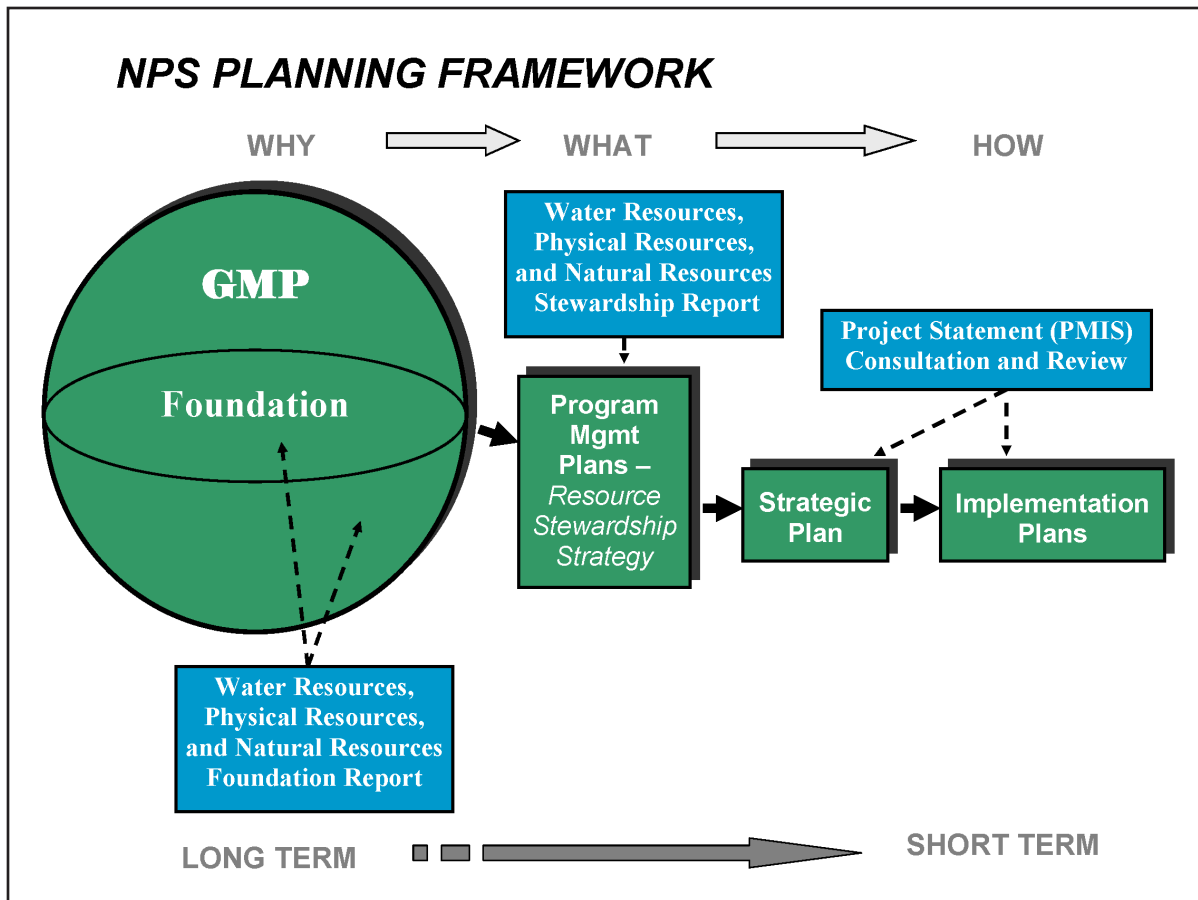


Figure 1. The NPS framework for planning and decision making (green boxes). Blue boxes represent WRD planning or assistance.

resources, and 3) identify stakeholders and laws and policies that apply to these priority water resources.

The **Water Resources Stewardship Report**, is designed to address the water resource needs in a park's Resource Stewardship Strategy (RSS) (Figure 1). This report provides strategies that enable a park to achieve or maintain a park's desired conditions for water resources, developing measurable or objective indicators that assess the degree to which the desired conditions are being achieved.

The Physical Resources and Natural Resources reports represent a multi-discipline approach for both the Foundation- and RSS-supporting products (Figure 1), designed to expand beyond water resources and include other natural resources.

The **Water Resources Information and Issues Overview report** provides water resources information and analyzes major water resource issues within the context of that information. However, it maintains a flexible design that can serve a park's unique water resource needs. The report can serve as a "stand alone" document or as a precursor for the GMP or RSS.

#### Completed Products

Since 1991, the WRD Planning Program has produced over 80 published reports that support various park planning and information needs. The *new generation* products were incorporated in 2005, with over 10 published reports under the new design. Copies of all WRD reports are available at:

<http://www.nature.nps.gov/water/planning>

#### Other Services

- Provides policy and technical review and input for water resource aspects of NPS planning documents (project agreements, Foundation Statement, General Management Plans, Resource Stewardship Strategies, etc.).
- Provides consultation on and review of water-based PMIS project statements that address the priorities of the park's Strategic Plan.

#### Status and Future

The *new generation* designs are being adopted by other NPS regions and Natural Resource Program Center (NRPC) divisions. Ultimately, the objective in the near future is to develop comprehensive natural resource products/services that pull from all NRPC divisions and programs, as appropriate, to support specific elements of park planning. This effort has been approved through the NPS Natural Resources Planning Technical Advisory Group.

Through pilot projects, a *Standard Operation Procedure (SOP)* report that captures "lessons learned" from the multi-discipline NRPC efforts will be generated. This SOP will become a living web-based document that incorporates the latest thoughts and recommendations for bringing the appropriate level of science into park planning.