



Watershed Condition Assessment Program

Background

Over 270 national park units (national parks, monuments, recreation areas, seashores, etc.) include significant natural resources. Each of these “parks” serves a common NPS mission goal: to protect, restore, and maintain natural resources and associated values in good condition, and to manage those resources within their broader ecosystem context (NPS Strategic Plan, Mission Goal 1a).

By 2014, the program hopes to fund a Natural Resource Condition Assessment (NRCA) for each of these parks. NRCAs provide a multi-disciplinary synthesis of existing data to describe current natural resource conditions, critical data and knowledge gaps, and existing/emerging resource condition influences (threats, stressors). Regional and historic conditions are also considered to provide a broader context for understanding park resource conditions and factors influencing those conditions.

NRCAs strive to develop new insights about park resource conditions, and to deliver science-based documentation that will help park managers:

- Develop near-term strategies and priorities for the park’s resource management program;
- Engage in watershed or landscape scale partnership and education efforts;
- Conduct long-term conservation planning to define desired conditions and management targets;
- Report on resource condition status to government performance measures (e.g., Dept. of Interior & Office of Management and Budget performance measures)

Assessment Approach and Products

NRCAs are interdisciplinary (ecological) in scope and emphasize map products in addition to a written report and technical data appendices. This maximizes usefulness of reporting products for a variety of park planning, decision making and performance reporting purposes.

Each NRCA project begins with a streamlined scoping process to ensure it is focused on the natural resources most important to that park (based on park resource setting and enabling legislation),

Program Links (Click Links below for Additional Information)

[Coastal Watershed Condition Assessment Fact Sheet](#)

[Completed Coastal Watershed Condition Assessment Phase One Reports](#)

[Status of the Coastal Watershed Condition Assessments](#)



and to identify existing data sets and types of expertise needed to assess that park’s resources. NRCA written report and map products:

- Characterize park-managed resources in their larger ecosystem context;
- Convey resource condition status for a set of individual measures, and summarize overall conditions for park areas of particular management interest (e.g. by watersheds, habitats, park management zones);
- Highlight data and knowledge gaps, and provide interpretations for a selected set of resource condition influences (threats, stressors).

A set of pilot NRCA projects are nearing completion (Fall 2008). Those pilots will be evaluated as a basis to revise national program guidelines and product standards, and to provide on-the-shelf examples for future NRCA projects.