



The Facts About Resource Stewardship Strategies

WHAT IS A RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP STRATEGY?

A Resource Stewardship Strategy (RSS) is a long-range planning document for a national park unit to achieve its desired natural and cultural resource conditions, which are derived from relevant laws and NPS policies identified in a park's foundation document, general management plan, or other park plans.

A park's foundation document provides the basis for understanding a park's fundamental and other important natural and cultural resources that are addressed by an RSS. As part of a park's planning portfolio, the RSS serves as a bridge between the park's foundation document and everyday management of its natural and cultural resources.

A Resource Stewardship Strategy evaluates the major components of the park's fundamental and other important resources that must be protected into the future; establishes science- and scholarship-based methods to evaluate success in protecting these resources; determines measurable targets for success; and includes a comprehensive strategic plan for achieving and maintaining those targets over time. RSS documents are reviewed by NPS subject matter experts and decision makers before finalization and approval; however, they are not publicly-reviewed decision documents.

WHY ARE RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP STRATEGIES NEEDED?

Resource stewardship strategies have gained a great deal of interest across the National Park Service in recent years due to their strategic approach to managing and protecting fundamental and other important park resources over time. In order for park managers to meet the requirements of resource stewardship under law and policy, they need to know the status and trend in the condition of the resources of each park, and then evaluate the condition relative to the park's target conditions. This information provides a basis for making resource decisions, and working with other agencies and the public will help ensure the long-term protection of park resources.

As the National Park Service approaches its 100th anniversary, and in the current realities of tight budgets and staffing shortages, there is a critical need for an established framework and a coordinated process for (1) summarizing, evaluating, and communicating the condition of priority park resources, and (2) determining what strategies and actions are needed to get us "from where we are to where we want to be." The RSS process will help guide the allocation of financial and human resources for resource stewardship at both the park and servicewide level.

WHO MANAGES THE RSS PROGRAM?

The growing interest in the importance of resource stewardship strategies calls for the establishment of a coordinated RSS Program within the National Park Service to provide a streamlined, consistent approach to their successful development. WASO Associate Directors of Park Planning, Facilities and Lands; Cultural Resources, Partnerships and Science; and Natural Resource Stewardship and Science will manage this new program in collaboration with regional offices and parks. The first year of the program has begun with hiring a RSS Coordinator and establishing a working group to provide guidance and consistency in developing a highly coordinated, streamlined approach. The RSS Coordinator is located at the Denver Service Center, Planning Division, in order to facilitate the production of future RSS projects.

ARE RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP STRATEGIES REQUIRED?

Resource stewardship strategies are not a required planning document; however, they have been identified as a high priority planning need by numerous national park units across the system—a prevailing outcome from over 100 completed foundation documents. Resource stewardship strategies are also emphasized in NPS Management Policies 2006 as a major element of park planning and decision making to achieve and maintain desired resource conditions.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS TO DEVELOP A RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP STRATEGY?

Before embarking on the development of a resource stewardship strategy, a park must have a recently completed foundation document, as well as natural and cultural resource condition assessments. The RSS Program can help parks evaluate their readiness to begin a RSS planning effort and assist them with information gaps.

The RSS process takes approximately one year to complete and includes two workshops. Before the first workshop, the RSS team works with park staff to gather key documents, data sets, condition assessments, FMSS data, and other information on natural resources and cultural resources. This information is compiled to inform the first three-day workshop held at the park, with key representatives from region and WASO program offices attending. The purpose of the first workshop is to develop the indicators of condition, specific measures, reference conditions, and management targets for all priority resources within a park.

A second workshop is then held to develop comprehensive strategies needed to get us “from where we are to where we want to be” for the purpose of developing comprehensive strategies and an implementation timeline. The RSS team conducts additional communications with subject matter experts prior to and after the second workshop to assist the park in refining workshop outcomes. A draft and final RSS is then prepared by an interdisciplinary RSS team that guides the process.

HOW IS A RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP STRATEGY FUNDED?

Each fiscal year, the RSS Program will coordinate with regional offices to select park units for developing RSSs. WASO Park, Planning, and Special Studies will provide funding to the planning team for these efforts. In addition, program and regional offices will provide additional staffing and travel support. Although parks do not bear the costs to develop a RSS, it is important to keep in mind that there is a considerable time commitment from park staff during the year-long process.

WHO DO I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION?

For more information about the program, please contact Chris Church, the RSS Coordinator, at chris_church@nps.gov or 303-969-2276.

