

Great Smoky Mountains National Park
Special Use Permit policy relating to
weddings, wedding receptions and wedding photography

General Information

Special events in national parks are a type of special park use and are governed by regulations and policy. The applicable regulation is 36 CFR 2.50. Policy guidance can be found in Management Policies and in DM-53 and RM-53. While considered in the broad category of special park uses, First Amendment activities are governed by 36 CFR 2.51 and 2.52 and are not considered special events.

Examples of special park uses which fall under the Special Event category and for which a permit is required include weddings, wedding receptions, wedding photography, memorial services, foot or bicycle races/rides/events, fundraisers, motorcades, large, organized non-commercial hikes, scattering cremains, geocaching, large picnics/reunions (except at reserved pavilions), etc. This policy deals specifically with Special Event permits for weddings, wedding receptions, and wedding photography, pursuant to 36 CFR 2.50. Unless otherwise noted, the term “wedding” as used in this policy refers also to wedding photography done by a professional photographer.

When is a Special Use Permit required for activities associated with weddings?

A Special Use Permit (SUP) is required for persons wishing to conduct a wedding or wedding reception in the Park and/or have wedding photographs taken in the Park by a professional photographer. When the wedding and associated photography are to be conducted at the same location/date/time and/or by the same Commercial Use Authorization (CUA) holder, both activities will generally be accommodated with a single SUP. If the photography is to be conducted at a different location/date/time or by a different CUA holder, i.e. if it constitutes a different event, a separate SUP may be required.

Are there any special requirements for commercial wedding planners and associated businesses?

Pursuant to 36 CFR 5.3, a Commercial Use Authorization (CUA) is required for businesses which provide some service in the park for a fee. Thus, commercial wedding planners, photographers, limousine services, etc., must obtain a CUA in order to provide those services in the park. Additional detail is provided in the Commercial Use Authorization (CUA) guidelines.

Ordained ministers of local churches shall be exempt from the requirement for a CUA, provided they perform no more than four weddings/year in the Park and do not advertise their services.

What is involved in applying for a Special Use Permit?

Persons wishing to conduct a wedding in the Park must complete the standard *Application for Special Use Permit* and return it by mail along with a *non-refundable* application fee. CUA holders may submit an application on behalf of their clients along with the required fee.

Applications must be received by the Park no less than 14 days in advance of the wedding date. Applications for weddings which require exemptions from the standard permit conditions must be received no less than 21 days in advance of the wedding date. Exceptions/exemptions will not be granted to weddings planned or conducted by a CUA holder.

While the Park will provide some guidance to callers on the types of activities generally approved for a Special Use Permit, final decisions will not be made in the absence of a completed *Application for Special Use Permit*.

Incomplete applications may be returned to the applicant, along with the application fee, without action. The Park will attempt to reach the applicant to resolve minor issues but may return the application without action if unable to reach the applicant over three business days. Applicants are encouraged to provide good, daytime, telephone contact information.

Wedding applications must list a specific location, date and time. See Attachment B. The Park will not provide assistance in selecting a location.

The Park will tentatively reserve a location/date/time by telephone and will hold that reservation for no more than seven (7) calendar days or until the receipt of an application, whichever is sooner. Tentative reservations will be made only for pre-designated locations listed in Attachment B.

Applicants will be encouraged (CUA holders required) to tentatively reserve a location/date/time by telephone. Otherwise, the application should list one or more alternative locations/dates/times to address the possibility that their first choice is not available.

Applicants should describe in reasonable detail any equipment or supplies that will be used at the event and which are not otherwise addressed in the standard permit conditions. Items not permitted are listed in Attachment A. Items not listed in the application will not be addressed in the permit and shall be presumed to be prohibited.

Applicants must make their own arrangements for someone to officiate the event. The National Park Service will not maintain a list of officials licensed to perform weddings nor will it make recommendations. A list of CUA holders (i.e. commercial wedding planners authorized to do provide services in the Park) will be provided on request.

How does one obtain the actual Special Use Permit?

The Park will endeavor to process applications and prepare a Special Use Permit within three (3) days of receipt of the application. Permits will be returned to the applicant for signature via email (in pdf format), fax or U.S. Mail.

Permits must be signed by the applicant and returned to the Park along with the required fee via U.S. Mail or fax. (See Fees below.) The permit must reach the Park no less than two business days in advance of the event date to facilitate final processing and return of the permit to the permittee. Upon receipt of the signed permit, the permit will be signed by the authorizing park official and a final copy returned by fax, U.S. Mail or email to the permittee. The original permit will be filed with the application by the park.

In the interest of efficiency, CUA holders will be allowed to sign a permit on behalf of their clients and return that copy to the park. However, the permittees (i.e. the bride and groom) must sign the permit at some time prior to the event and have that copy in their possession at the time of the event.

Applicants should not make plans or commitments based on the proposed location/date/time until they are in possession of a fully executed permit. Applicants should therefore submit their application well in advance of any deadlines for mailing invitations, etc.

Fees

- A *non-refundable* application fee, in the amount of \$50, will be charged for all Special Event applications. Applications received without the required fee will be returned without action.
- A *non-refundable* permit fee, in the amount of \$150, will be charged for preparing the permit itself. The permit fee will be waived for weddings which follow standard guidelines and which do not require a customized permit. When no permit fee is required, permits may be returned to the park via fax rather than U.S. Mail.
- A facility use fee will be charged in the future for the use of any church or historic structure. This fee will not be implemented until the necessary administrative review has been completed. Facility use fees for picnic pavilions will be waived in lieu of the reservation fee.

Are there any distinctions between privately-planned weddings and those done by a commercial wedding planner?

Yes. Because of the high number of weddings conducted in the Gatlinburg area by commercial wedding services, the impacts that have resulted from the number of events conducted in the park and the park's obligation to assure that commercial activities are not detrimental to normal public use, certain restrictions have been placed on weddings conducted by commercial wedding planners.

• Privately planned weddings

- Couples are encouraged to conform to the conditions described in this policy, including Attachments A and B. If they do so, the permit fee will be waived. Applications for events which require anything other than a minor change from the conditions set forth herein must be received no less than 21 days in advance of the

- wedding and a permit fee of \$150.00 will be charged (in addition to the application fee) to cover the costs of preparing a customized permit.
- Applications should include the name of the minister or justice of the peace that will be performing the service along with the name of any businesses that will be providing services within the park, i.e. a florist, limousine, photographer. All commercial vendors engaged by the permittee (e.g. photographer, limousine, etc.) must have a park-issued Commercial Use Authorization.
 - Picnic pavilions may be used for weddings and/or receptions provided the use is addressed in the application and the permittee obtains the necessary reservation (1-800-365-2267 or <http://reservations.nps.gov>). The pavilion in the Cades Cove group camp is not considered a picnic pavilion and its use for weddings is prohibited.
 - The use of a caterer will be permitted, provided the name and address of the caterer is listed in the application or provided ASAP.
 - Sound amplification equipment may be permitted at a pavilion.
 - Receptions at locations other than picnic pavilions will be considered on a case by case basis and will generally incur the \$150 permit fee.
 - **Commercially planned weddings**
 - Locations are limited to those listed in Attachment B.
 - The application must list the name and phone number of the commercial wedding planner in addition to the names, addresses and phone numbers of the client couple. The application must also list the services that the wedding planner will provide in the Park, e.g. flowers, limousine, and photography.
 - The use of park picnic pavilions for weddings or receptions planned or conducted by commercial wedding vendors is prohibited.

What restrictions are imposed on wedding activities and what is the reason for these restrictions?

Most restrictions relate to the Park's obligation to protect natural and cultural resources and to assure that special park uses do not interfere with normal public access and use. Some restrictions result from the high volume of *commercial* wedding activity in the Sevier County area. Some policy guidelines are intended to provide for a reasonably efficient permit process.

Please see Attachment A and B for specific conditions. Additional considerations or restrictions include the following:

- Wedding permits will allow for a maximum of 6 cars and 20 people, unless other limits are listed in Attachment B. These limits include the minister and/or employees of the CUA holder. Applications for privately planned weddings which exceed those numbers will be considered on a case by case basis. This restriction is directly related to the number of available parking spaces at most locations.
- Outdoor wedding services will be limited to one hour, including setup, photography and cleanup. Services conducted in a historic structure will be limited to a total of 90 minutes. (Time limits for events at park pavilions will be governed by the facility reservation.)
- Permits will not be issued for more than one location (i.e. a first choice and an inclement weather backup) and the Park will not make last minute changes in

- response to bad weather.
- No more than two weddings will be scheduled per day at any single location. A 30 minute “buffer” will generally be scheduled between the first and second event at the same location.
 - Historic structures, including churches, are dark inside, are not heated and do not have electricity. The Park does not clean these structures for special events. Permittees are encouraged to inspect structures before use. See Attachment A for specific cleaning restrictions.
 - Special considerations for the Cades Cove area:
 - Weekend visitation in Cades Cove is very high from April through October. Extra travel time should be allowed for preparation and guest transportation.
 - The Cades Cove loop road opens at official sunrise and closes at official sunset. Permits will be scheduled to conclude no less than one hour before sunset to allow time to exit the loop.
 - *The Cades Cove loop road is closed to motor vehicles until 10:00 AM on Wednesdays and Saturdays from early May through late September. Services will not be scheduled before 11:30 AM on these days in order to allow for transportation delays.*

Standard conditions applicable to weddings, wedding receptions and wedding photography

These conditions are intended to authorize *discrete services/ceremonies appropriate to the quiet, natural settings found in the Park*. Persons wishing to have a large wedding and/or utilize formal music or decorations should select a location outside the park.

- Virtually the entire Park is open to public use. A Special Use Permit *does not* grant the permit holder exclusive use of the specified area and the holder may not restrict other visitors from using the area in which the wedding is being held.
- The permit must be in the possession of the permittee at the time of the event and must be displayed to a park employee upon request. To facilitate monitoring by the park and minimize disruptions to weddings, permittees should display a copy of the permit on the dashboard of a vehicle associated with the wedding so that it is visible to an inspecting ranger.
- Participation in the event is limited to a maximum of 6 cars and 20 people, unless otherwise noted. (Exceptions will be considered on a case-by-case basis for privately planned weddings.) These limits include the minister and/or employees and vehicles associated with the commercial wedding planner.
- All vehicles must be parked in designated (i.e. paved or graveled) parking areas. Vehicles, may not be parked on road shoulders, may not impede traffic flow and may not be driven off road or into fields. Parking spaces may not be reserved or blocked off nor can parked vehicles interfere with normal public use. Car pooling from larger parking areas is encouraged. Most parking areas will not accommodate long limousines, so limousines may need to “stage” at another location.
- Acoustical instruments and/or one battery-powered tape/CD player are permitted, provided they are played at a reasonable volume. Sound amplification equipment, including electric musical instruments and keyboards and the use of a generator, is prohibited, unless otherwise noted. .
- Discrete floral arrangements are permitted. (Exceptions will be considered on a case-by-case basis for privately planned weddings.) All decorations must be removed immediately after the event.
- Tents, tables, banners, signs (including directional signs), and decorations such as balloons, garden arches, carpet runners, etc., are prohibited. Up to six chairs will be allowed to accommodate participants with special needs, e.g. the elderly or infirm.
- The use or release of live animals, e.g. butterflies or doves, is prohibited.
- The use, throwing or scattering of rice, birdseed, confetti, silly string, bubbles, flower petals (real or artificial), etc. is prohibited.
- Food, including wedding cake, is prohibited in or near historic structures.
- The use of horse-drawn vehicles is prohibited.
- The use of facilities not listed in the permit is prohibited for event preparation, e.g. using a structure as a rain shelter. Permittees should make alternate plans (outside the park) to accommodate bad weather.

Standard conditions applicable to weddings, wedding receptions and wedding photography

- The Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a sanctuary for all living things. Weddings are not exempt from any Park regulations. The following are of particular interest:
 - All natural features within the Park (flowers, animals, rocks, etc) are protected.
 - Alcoholic beverages are not permitted except at designated picnic areas and campgrounds.
 - Unreasonable noise, such as horn honking, dragging tin cans, etc. is prohibited.
 - Littering is prohibited, including that which could result from tying items to a car.

Special considerations for historic structures:

- Historic structures must be used *as is*, i.e. furnishings may not be moved or disturbed nor may nails or similar devices be used to hang items from walls, furniture or other surfaces.
- Candles, oil lamps, and other open flames are not permitted.
- The permittee may clean a structure before using it. Cleaning means sweeping and dusting and/or washing with soapy water. The use of any chemical cleaning agents is prohibited. The use of a sweeping compound is permitted, provided it is disposed of outside the Park.

Pre-designated locations for weddings, wedding receptions and wedding photography

Unless otherwise noted:

- No more than two events will be scheduled per day at any one location.
- Attendance is limited to 20 people and 6 cars.

Permitted locations	Date/time restrictions	Other remarks
<u>Cataloochee Overlook</u>	None	None
<u>Cataract Falls</u> (on the Cove Mountain trail near park headquarters)	From May through October, events will be scheduled to avoid any conflicts with park programs. (One hour walks are scheduled for 11AM and 1 PM in 2006.)	No parking or waiting at trailhead from 7:30 AM to 5:00 PM on weekdays. During those times, vehicles must be parked at Sugarlands Visitor Center.
<u>Chimneys Picnic Area</u>	From May 25 thru Sept. 7 and all of October, 8 AM to 10 AM only. No time restrictions on other dates.	None
<u>Clingmans Dome parking area</u> and the immediate vicinity (The observation tower and the trail leading to it are not part of the designated area.)	None	None
<u>Foothills Parkway east.</u> Applications must list the specific overlook. (Overlooks are numbered from 1 to 4, beginning at the west end, i.e. the overlook closest to Hwy 321 is #1; the one closest to I-40 is #4.)	None	Maximum of 4 weddings per day total.
<u>Foothills Parkway west.</u> Applications must list the specific overlook. (Overlooks are numbered from 1 to 14, beginning at the east end. Most overlooks are marked with a sign bearing the overlook number. Note that there is a number 4 ½ though!)	None	Maximum of 4 weddings per day total.
<u>Gatlinburg By-pass overlooks and entrance</u> (aka “picture”), <u>sign.</u> Applications must list the specific overlook. The south overlook is south of the Ski Mtn overpass; the north overlook is north of the overpass. The entrance sign is on the north end of the bypass, near the Spur.	None	Maximum of 3 cars at the picture sign.
<u>Greenbrier #1</u> , specifically the area between U.S. 321 and the Greenbrier Ranger Station. This includes roadside areas and the “beach” area along the Middle Prong of the Little Pigeon River.	From May 25 thru Sept. 7, no events between 10 AM and 6 PM.	
<u>Greenbrier #2</u> , specifically the area at the Old Settlers Trailhead, including the area adjacent to the river.	None	None
<u>Heintooga overlook</u>	None	None
<u>Maloney Point</u> (just east of Fighting Creek Gap)	None	None
<u>Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area</u> (excluding the pavilion)	From May 25 thru Sept. 7 and all of October, 8 AM to 10 AM only. No time restrictions at other dates.	(The west half of the picnic area is closed in the off season.)
<u>Millsap</u> (0.3 mile west of the Elkmont junction on Little River Road.)	None	None

Pre-designated locations for weddings, wedding receptions and wedding photography

Permitted locations	Date/time restrictions	Other remarks
<u>Mingus Mill</u>	From March through November, no events between 9 AM and 5 PM.	1 event per day.
<u>Newfound Gap parking area</u> and the immediate vicinity	None	None
<u>Noah Bud Ogle cabin</u>	From May 25 thru Sept. 7 and all of October, 8 AM to 10 AM only. No time restrictions at other dates.	
<u>Oconaluftee overlook</u> (mile post 15.3 on the Newfound Gap Road.	None	None
<u>Rock Wall Curve</u> parking area and nearby creek (mile post 26.7 on Newfound Gap Road)	None	None
<u>Wildlife overlook</u> on the Cades Cove loop road (i.e. about 0.5 mile past the Missionary Baptist Church)	No permits in October. From May 25 thru Sept. 7, no events before 11 AM or after 6 PM.	
Picnic pavilions		
Collins Creek, Cosby, Deep Creek, Greenbrier, Metcalf Bottoms, and Twin Creeks pavilions may be used for privately-planned weddings. The Permittee is responsible for making the necessary reservation. (1-800-365-2267 or http://reservations.nps.gov). The use of pavilions is prohibited for events conducted by commercial wedding planners.		The number of people (and cars) is pavilion-specific. Use of the Cades Cove group camp pavilion is prohibited for all weddings and associated activities. Use of pavilions by commercially planned weddings is prohibited.

Pre-designated locations for weddings, wedding receptions and wedding photography

Churches		
<u>Methodist Church</u> at Cades Cove	No permits in October. From May 25 thru Sept. 7, no events before 11 AM or after 6 PM.	Maximum of 6 cars and 50 people. Application must identify transportation plans.
<u>Missionary Baptist Church</u> at Cades Cove	No permits in October. From May 25 thru Sept. 7, no events before 11 AM or after 6 PM.	Maximum of 6 cars and 50 people. Application must identify transportation plans.
<u>Palmer Chapel</u> at Cataloochee		1 event per day; Maximum of 10 cars and 50 people. Application must identify transportation plans.
<u>Primitive Baptist Church</u> at Cades Cove	No permits in October. From May 25 thru Sept. 7, no events before 11 AM or after 6 PM.	Maximum of 10 cars and 60 people. Application must identify transportation plans.
<u>Smokemont Church</u>		Maximum of 6 cars and 40 people. Application must identify transportation plans.