

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Branch of Aviation
Division of Fire and Aviation



Aviation Strategic Plan 2017 - 2021



Aviation Program Mission

The NPS Aviation Management Program provides leadership at the national, regional and park levels to ensure safe, efficient, and appropriate use of aviation resources.



Aviation Strategic Plan

2017 - 2021

National Park Service Branch of Aviation
Boise, Idaho

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Facing page: Lake Clark National Park and Preserve's airplane at Twin Lakes.

Inset image: Yosemite National Park.

Introduction and Purpose

The National Park Service (NPS) has the challenge and responsibility of preserving and protecting human life and the resources entrusted to its management.

An integral component of carrying out the NPS mission is the use of aviation in all program activities within NPS while ensuring safe and efficient operations across the Service.

The NPS maintains an aviation program that meets the needs and complexity of park units servicewide. NPS aviation activities involve the most diverse use of aviation resources of any bureau in the Department of the Interior (DOI). These operations include, but are not limited to, natural and cultural resource management, law enforcement, wildland fire operations, search and rescue, cargo and personnel transport, medical evacuations, short haul, rappelling and Aerial Capture and Eradication and Tagging of Animals (ACETA). These activities involve both staffed airplanes and helicopters, Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), and are performed in a diversity of terrain, altitude, and weather conditions. Such activities and aircraft configurations require pilots and support personnel that are highly trained in special technical aviation skills. As NPS aviation moves into the future with new technology, UAS will play a greater role in aviation operations.

Aviation activities have inherent risks. To mitigate those risks, the NPS uses the principles of Operational Leadership (OL) with the principles of Safety Management Systems (SMS) which are recognized by the FAA, NPS partners and the International Civil Aviation Organization as international aviation standards. SMS principles form the four pillars of the aviation program: aviation policy, aviation risk management, assuring aviation safety and promoting aviation safety. The pillars comprise the strategic goals in this plan. The NPS Aviation Program provides oversight to ensure the risks associated with performing these operations are minimized.

This strategic plan provides vision and aviation mission intent to guide decisions about priorities, scope and direction of the national aviation program for the next five years. Program decisions, initiatives and work plans will be directly tied to this plan.

Thirty-four percent (34%) of NPS aviation missions support resource management functions.





Aerial Capture, Tagging and Eradication of Animals (ACETA) is just one of example of the diverse aviation operations in the National Park Service.

Role and Function

The NPS Aviation Branch is responsible for developing servicewide policy related to aviation operational procedures, equipment, personnel qualifications, and safety standards.

These policies are in addition to those required by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and DOI. The program functions under the Associate Director, Visitor and Resource Protection, through the Chief, Division of Fire and Aviation, and the Chief, Branch of Aviation. The program is staffed with National Aviation Office personnel located in Boise, Idaho and Regional Aviation Managers in five of the seven regional offices. Though the program is staffed within the Visitor and Resource Protection portfolio, it supports all branches of the NPS.

GUIDING PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

To ensure safe and efficient aviation operations across the National Park Service, the NPS Aviation Branch has created the following NOTAM* for aviation users to become familiar with the guiding philosophy of the national program.

Never stop striving to achieve the highest standards of aviation safety and professionalism for NPS employees and cooperators engaged in aviation activities.

Offer accurate and consistent leadership, establish policies that foster a positive culture assuring aviation safety and provide direction for the aviation program to increase the effectiveness of operations servicewide.

Training will promote aviation safety while being relevant and readily available to meet policy requirements and field operation needs.

Assurance of aviation policy implementation and accountability are essential to the success of the aviation program.

Manage aviation risks effectively so that they are mitigated and minimized to the greatest extent possible.

*The FAA's information portal for disseminating information to pilots and aviation users is through a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) system.

Strategic Goal 1 - Ensure Aviation Policy Compliance

Objective: Provide leadership to establish policies that foster a positive culture of aviation safety throughout the Service.

CORE STRATEGIES

1.1 Ensure staffing exists at the park, regional and national levels to support the aviation needs of the National Park Service.

1.2 Establish, where appropriate, timetables for the review of policies to ensure current and relevant issues are addressed.

1.3 Review RM-60 annually and make changes incorporating best aviation practices.

Objective: Strive for no injuries or fatalities to employees, partners, and/or visitors during an aviation operation; minimize the damage or loss of any aviation asset.

CORE STRATEGIES

1.4 Ensure that an aviation operation evaluation program is in place and in compliance with RM-60.

1.6 Perform park aviation program evaluations in conjunction with the appropriate Regional Aviation Manager and Office of Aviation Services (OAS) if applicable.

1.5 Perform regional aviation program evaluations.

1.7 Ensure specific aviation plans required in RM-60, such as park Aviation Management Plans are current and relevant.

NOTAM: Offer accurate and consistent leadership and Assurance of aviation policy implementation and accountability

Twenty-nine percent (29%) of NPS aviation missions transport personnel and cargo.



Strategic Goal 2 - Practice Risk Management

Objective: Establish a quality assurance/quality control (QAQC) program that will continually assess and monitor all facets of the NPS aviation program.

CORE STRATEGIES

2.1 Create and implement QAQC that meets the needs of the NPS.

2.2 Utilize audit tools that measure risk mitigation and controls (such as A123) to identify strengths, improvements, deficiencies, and to track trends in park aviation programs.

2.3 Analyze audit responses to determine what aviation program support is needed in park units.

2.4 Create an Annual Aviation Program Report, which includes accomplishments, identified deficiencies and other relevant information that promotes compliance with aviation policy and ensures risks are identified, analyzed, communicated to leadership and mitigated.

NOTAM: *Manage aviation risks.*

Thirteen percent (13%) of NPS aviation missions support law enforcement activities.



Strategic Goal 3 - Assuring Aviation Safety

Objective: Provide support and guidance in aviation program management based on the principles of Safety Management Systems and the NPS Safety, Health, and Wellness Strategy to all levels of management and functional areas within the NPS.

CORE STRATEGIES

- 3.1 Represent the needs of the parks and NPS aviation users to the Department and provide a liaison role when necessary.
- 3.2 Provide technical assistance based on the principles of SMS and OL to park managers as they plan for park aviation operations.
- 3.3 Leverage the National Aviation Advisory Group's (NAAG) collective program management experience to identify relevant, best business practices that address aviation needs of the NPS.
- 3.4 Create national, state and local agreements with cooperators to benefit park operations.
- 3.5 Implement a structured pilot pre-hire process that will help identify individuals that will succeed as a NPS pilot.
- 3.6 Ensure NPS aviation programs are fiscally responsible.
- 3.7 Participate in mishap reviews and identify corrective actions when applicable.

NOTAM: Never stop striving to achieve the highest standards.

Helicopter conducting search and rescue operation near Sentinel Rock in Yosemite National Park on June 24, 1965, represents the National Park Service's long history of utilizing aviation to accomplish park missions.



Strategic Goal 4 - Promoting Aviation Safety

Objective: Implement a consistent and ongoing training, education and safety communication program, including aviation career development, which will improve and enhance aviation safety in NPS.

CORE STRATEGIES

4.1 Provide guidance to parks in the hiring, training and development of aviation personnel.

4.2 Provide training and tools to help park employees with aviation responsibilities meet their training requirements.

4.3 Develop a program that supports parks with instructor training to meet DOI and NPS requirements.

4.4 Provide consistent fleet pilot training and professional development on a continuous basis.

4.5 Support a NPS Pilot Intake Program for sustainability of NPS aviation operations.

4.6 Work with communication and education personnel to provide aviation safety awareness information to NPS personnel and the public.

4.7 Develop a career ladder framework to create future NPS aviation leaders.

4.8 Utilize established award guidance to recognize outstanding performance and safe aviation operations

NOTAM: Training will promote aviation safety.

Thirteen percent (13%) of NPS aviation missions are to support wildfire and prescribed fire activities.



Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

Implementation of the Aviation Strategic Plan will be accomplished systematically by identifying annual programs of work, process and budget priorities that tie directly to achieving the strategic goals and the core strategies of this plan.

Annual programs of work will be developed that support these goals and strategies.

Monitoring and evaluation of the strategic plan will occur annually. A comprehensive review and update of this strategic plan will occur at the end of a five-year period following its release. Monitoring of short-term accomplishments will occur concurrently with the annual work planning process. This will allow for program adjustments and provide guidance to regions for the development of annual work plans.

The process for accomplishing the above will be a team effort. This will guide the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategic plan. The NAAG is responsible for executing a continuous programmatic assessment to ensure best practices are instituted for National Park Services. The NAAG will be made up of members from the National Aviation Office, Regional Aviation Managers and various representatives from park management.

Four percent (4%) of NPS aviation missions support Search & Rescue (SAR) operations.



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Seven percent (7%) of NPS flight hours are for the maintenance of aircraft that support our aviation missions.



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