



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Policy Memorandum 25-01

To: National Park Service Senior Leadership
Superintendents

From: Comptroller, Exercising the Delegated Authority of the Director

Subject: Lighting and Projecting Images on Resources within National Park System Units

1. Purpose and Duration

This Policy Memorandum provides guidance about how the National Park Service (NPS) will manage requests by external parties for the temporary lighting and projecting of images on facilities, monuments, or other resources within units of the National Park System, and outlines areas where such activities may be completely prohibited. This Memorandum does not apply to NPS operational, resource and visitor protection, or public safety activities. The guidance in this Memorandum supplements existing guidance in NPS *Management Policies* (2006) and regulations in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).

This Memorandum will remain in effect until amended, superseded, or rescinded by the Director.

2. Background

The National Park System is made up of exceptional places, including their scenery, natural features, significant cultural resources, and important historic properties. The NPS Organic Act ([54 USC 100101](#) *et seq.*) charges the NPS with protecting and preserving these places and their associated resources so that they remain unimpaired for future generations.

Each year, the NPS receives numerous requests to light or project images onto monuments, memorials, facilities, and other resources within System units. Current projection technology allows lights and images to be projected onto resources in open or closed areas of System units. These projections across and onto open and closed areas may impact resources, the visitor experience, and NPS operations.

For purposes of this Memorandum, lighting refers to requests by external parties for permits for lighting normally unlit features and changing the color or pattern of existing lights maintained by the NPS on the exterior of buildings, monuments or significant natural features, through lasers, projections, or holograms or other lighting techniques, apparatus or any other means of producing or projecting artificial light, images or patterns; or the manipulation of lights to darken or reduce the amount of light for purposes of communicating a message of any kind. These requests are varied, sometimes controversial, and may be commercial in nature. They often

attract attention from the media, elected officials, advocacy groups, stakeholders, and the general public. The NPS has rarely approved requests from external parties to light or project images on System unit resources and has generally done so only when directed by Congress.¹

3. Related Regulations and Guidance

NPS regulations at [36 CFR 1.6](#) allow a superintendent to issue permits when authorized by other regulations when the permitted activity is consistent with applicable legislation, Federal regulation and administrative policies, and upon a determination that visitor experience, park operations, and natural and cultural resources, among other things, will not be adversely impacted.

Ethics regulations require Federal employees to act impartially and refrain from preferential treatment of any private organization or individual. Ethics regulations also prohibit Federal employees from using their Government position, title, or any authority associated with public office in a manner that could reasonably be construed to imply the NPS or the Government sanctions or endorses the activities of any organization, or endorses any product, service, or enterprise except in very limited circumstances. See [5 CFR 2635.702](#).

Other more specific NPS regulations and policies address different types of activities that may be authorized through special use or other permits. Regulations in [36 CFR part 2](#) and at [36 CFR 7.96](#) address special events and First Amendment activities.² Regulations in [36 CFR part 5](#) address advertising and other commercial activities. Lighting or projection requests may be associated with special events, First Amendment, or commercial activities; activities not impacted by this policy should be evaluated under appropriate law and policy.

4. Policy

The NPS will not authorize external parties to light or project images onto facilities, monuments, or other resources through special use permits, leases, contracts, or any other legal instrument, unless specifically directed by an act, resolution, or proclamation of Congress. Requests must be denied in coordination with the Special Park Uses Program, Washington Support Office, which must be consulted before responding to the applicant. This policy will ensure consistent treatment of applicants seeking to conduct these activities and avoid permitting decisions that have Service-wide adverse consequences. For purposes of this Memorandum, an external party is any entity that is not an agency, bureau, or other administrative unit of the Department of the Interior. External parties also include entities that are associated with but not part of the Department, including commissions, partners, or friend's groups.

Although lighting and projecting images are not intended to permanently change the appearance of a facility, monument or other resource, applicable laws, regulations, and policies make it

¹ For example, [Pub. L. 116-28](#) requested “the Secretary of the Interior to authorize unique and one-time arrangements for the display of NASA and Smithsonian artifacts, digital content, film footage, and associated historic audio and imagery, in and around the vicinity of the National Mall, including projected onto the surface of the Washington Monument for five nights of public display during the period beginning on July 16, 2019 and ending on July 20, 2019.”

² See [36 CFR 2.50](#) and [2.51](#), which address special events and First Amendment activities System-wide. See also [36 CFR 7.96](#), which includes special provisions for these activities in the National Capital Region.

difficult for the NPS to authorize such activities without unintended Service-wide impacts. The NPS does not consider the exterior surfaces of facilities, monuments, and many other resources to be public fora for purposes of First Amendment activities. This policy will promote public trust in the NPS's ability to manage activities that occur within System units for the protection of visitors and resources. This Memorandum does not prohibit the use of lighting or projection as part of a permitted special event or First Amendment activity so long as such lighting or projection is not directed onto facilities, monuments, or other resources within a System unit.

The NPS itself will not light or project images onto facilities, monuments, or other resources except for operational, resource and visitor protection, or public safety purposes. The NPS may co-sponsor certain other lighting activities as described below. This Memorandum does not limit the Director from allowing Service-wide lighting or projection initiatives related to NPS-sponsored national celebration events or initiatives such as historical commemorations, birthdays, and anniversaries. Also, this Memorandum does not prohibit the use of lighting or projection related to official NPS co-sponsored "America250" events, which are those special events planned, organized, and executed by executive departments and agencies or the Semiquincentennial Commission for the celebration of the 250th anniversary of American Independence. Co-sponsorship by the NPS may be undertaken in several forms, including but not limited to planning, organizing, publicizing, hosting, financing, executing, or providing in-kind support for an event. All co-sponsorship activities will be supported by written documentation, such as a formal agreement, that clearly delineates the respective roles and responsibilities of each party. Superintendents retain authority and discretion to determine whether the NPS will participate as a co-sponsor of any event, provided it is memorialized in writing. In addition to the agreement, permits may still be required by regulations or other applicable law or NPS policy.

All policy waiver requests will be routed through the Special Park Uses Program in addition to the Office of Policy. See [Director's Order #1: NPS Directives System](#), in particular, section 6.4. Administrative lighting decisions intended solely to protect park resources and values are beyond the scope of this Memorandum.

5. Third-Party Enforceability

This Memorandum is intended only to improve the internal management of the NPS and is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or equity by a party against the United States, its departments, agencies, instrumentalities or entities, its officers or employees, or any other person.

-----*End of Policy Memorandum*-----