
National Parks Service Programs in Washington, district of Columbia¹

Presenter:

Robert G. Stanton,² Regional Director, National Park Service

Background

National Capital Region (NCR) parkland amounts to about 7,000 acres within the District of Columbia and almost 60,000 acres in Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia. NCR has some 447 miles of parkways and primary roads, more than 150 statues, monuments and memorials, and serves more than 38 million visitors annually. Some 717 miles of trails and bike paths wind through NCR parks.

Park sites in Washington include the National Mall, the White House, Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, Thomas Jefferson Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial, Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, Rock Creek Park (the country's largest and first urban park), Anacostia Park, George Washington Memorial Parkway, and the C&O Canal National Historical Park.

NCR sponsors and conducts numerous national celebrations—the Cherry Blossom Festival, Independence Day, and Presidential anniversary wreath-layings at the Thomas Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials and the Washington Monument. Birthday wreath-laying ceremonies are also held at the Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial, Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, and the Lincoln Memorial in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. NCR also sponsors the National Christmas Pageant of Peace and other events of national and international importance.

NCR provides various visitor services through its concession operations. These include interpretive

sightseeing, golf courses, transportation, tennis courts, several marinas, ice-skating rinks, horseback riding facilities, and food services. Fifteen concessions are operated at 40 separate locations.

Programs for At-risk Youth

The NCR also operates programs that serve the needs of at-risk youth. Program objectives include:

- (1) developing and administering outdoor educational, recreational and cultural programs for Washington youth;
- (2) forging partnerships with the District of Columbia Department of Recreation and Parks, school system, community organizations, private sector, youth organizations and others in order to achieve a sustained level of support and cooperation;
- (3) offering expanded and, in some instances, new opportunities for youth to be gainfully employed in National Park Service areas and programs; and
- (4) providing opportunities for participants to gain an increased awareness of the cultural diversity of outstanding citizens who contributed to the growth of the nation, and who are commemorated in units of the National Park system.

This final objective focuses on the benefits of parks to the participant's intergroup education. These benefits include:

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² U.S. Department of the Interior 1100 Ohio Drive, S.W. Washington, DC 20242 Phone: (202) 619-7000

- (a) helping members of a group who are commemorated (e.g., Native American, Hispanic, Asian American, African American) gain a greater awareness and appreciation of their own heritage and take pride in knowing that others can share in their contributions or achievements;
- (b) helping members of groups enhance their appreciation of each other's contributions;
- (c) helping participants gain a sense of belonging, self-recognition and appreciation of the history and future of the United States; and
- (d) using cultural and historic parks to serve as a bridge from personal lifeways to the group's cultural heritage.

Staff have been charged with the responsibility to develop exciting and innovative opportunities for youth to experience park resources and programs. Each manager within his or her authority and area of responsibility is required to develop programs with input from youth meetings, school teachers and administrators, and other community leaders. Managers are encouraged to use Congressionally approved appropriation authority to transport youth to nearby parks for educational and recreational programs.

In 1975 Congress authorized the use of funds to transport youth into the national parks as a part of their educational and recreational experience. NCR has been a leader in this effort with approximately 1,000 youngsters transported in 1994 from the city to parks.

Program Content

Parks as Classrooms: Activity-driven, curriculum-based education programs are offered to school groups in park settings. All parks take part in this program, but of particular note is the Model Elementary Science Outdoor Classroom Program at Fort Dupont, National Capital Parks-East. The program is part of a national effort to encourage active participation and utilization of national parks in furthering educational objectives.

Summer Camp: The Community Outreach and Special Park Initiatives (COSPI) Summer Camp program provides overnight camping experiences to six different community-based organizations located in Washington. Over 380 youths are served. Prince William Forest Park and Catocin Mountain Parks were the two sites utilized for this program.

Sportsmobile: The COSPI Sportsmobile program provides activities for youth at National Park Service facilities. Concentrating on seven parks in the region, the Sportsmobile has provided

additional resources to the parks while introducing urban youth to the enjoyment of open space. To date, the Sportsmobile has been utilized by 20 community-based organizations and served over 1,100 youth, ages 5-13. These organizations were able to enhance their summer day camp programs by utilizing the Sportsmobile.

Saturday Field Trips: The COSPI Field Trip program provides leisure activity to seven different community-based organizations located in the District of Columbia and one located in Montgomery County, Maryland. Over 250 youths are served. The C&O Canal and Great Falls Parks were the two sites utilized for this program. In addition to transportation, COSPI coordinates ranger-led programs at each park. Youth from Washington's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) are used to maintain communications between the COSPI office and community-based organizations who participate in camping and Saturday field trip activities.

United States Park Police Explorer Post 1791: The Explorer Post, an affiliate of the Boy Scouts of America, has proven to be an asset to the police by providing assistance with crowd and traffic control at many special events, parades and other on-call assignments. Law enforcement explorers (young male and female adults between the age of 14 and 21) are provided with an opportunity to gain experience in the law enforcement profession. Ninety-seven percent are African-American students from the District of Columbia. Fifteen individuals participate in the year-round program.

Youth Conservation Corps (YCC): The Youth Conservation Corps is an eight-week summer park employment program for young participants (male and female) ages 15 through 18. In 1994 personnel from NCP-East, Central, Rock Creek, and Greenbelt Parks worked with individuals primarily from the District of Columbia metropolitan area. Ninety-eight percent were African American.

District of Columbia Summer Youth Employment Program (DCSYEP): The DCSYEP provides summer employment and training for youth within the District of Columbia between the ages of 14 and 21. For more than 15 years, NCR has worked with the District of Columbia in a partnership agreement that makes summer jobs available for District of Columbia youth. Funds for staff salaries are provided by NCR, along with training and orientation and day-to-day supervision. Other incidentals that are provided include transportation, safety work equipment, supplies and materials. In 1994 this program served 85 students for the six-week program.

District of Columbia Service Corps: NCR became a partner with the District of Columbia Service Corps in order to provide young people between the ages of 17 and 23 opportunities to work with the area's elementary and secondary schools and the campuses of the District's universities and colleges.

Consortium of Churches: NCR provides assistance to the Community Church Association (a consortium of churches in District of Columbia). The program consists of overnight camping, environmental awareness, and an overview of the National Park Service. The region provides transportation, lodging, and an interpretative program at Camp Round Meadow in Catoctin Mountain Park. A total of 250 African-American youth between the ages of 6 and 13 participate.