

Reclamation Manual

Policy

Subject:	Visitor Centers
Purpose:	Establishes Bureau of Reclamation policy for planning, developing, interpreting, managing, and operating visitor centers at Reclamation projects. The benefit of this Policy is to ensure that visitor centers are planned and developed according to the geographic location and the anticipated visitation. In addition, through interpretation, visitor centers will provide Reclamation an opportunity to educate the public about Reclamation's mission.
Authority:	Reclamation Act of 1902, as amended and supplemented; Randolph Sheppard Act of 1936 (Public Law 74-732); Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-578); Federal Water Project Recreation Act of 1965, as amended (Public Law 89-72); National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665); Architectural Barriers Act of 1968; Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-112); National and Community Service Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-610); Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-101-Volunteer Program); American's with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-336); Sundry Civil Appropriations Act of 1992 (Public Law 66-389); Reclamation Projects Authorization Act of 1992 (Public Law 102-575); Educate America Act of 1994 (Public Law 103-227); Hoover Dam Miscellaneous Sales Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-461); Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-477); Department of the Interior Volunteer Recruitment Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-125); 43 Code of Federal Regulations 17, subparts B and E; Department of the Interior Manual, Part 471 (Audiovisual Media and Publications), Chapter 3 (Production and Use of Exhibits).
Approving Official:	Commissioner
Contact:	Office of Program and Policy Services; Land Resources Office, 84-53000

1. **Visitor Center Goals and Objectives.** Reclamation and, where applicable, its managing partners (including nonprofit organizations) will ensure that visitor centers are planned, developed, interpreted, managed, and operated in an appropriate and cost-effective manner. As authorized by the authorities listed above, and based on the principles contained in this Policy, Reclamation may develop visitor centers with appropriate facilities, services, and programs for the purposes of:
 - A. Informing the public about Reclamation and water projects;
 - B. Enhancing the quality of recreation and tourism opportunities for all visitors, including those with physical, sensory, and cognitive impairments;

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- C. Describing other opportunities and facilities that are available within the project;
 - D. Providing information and interpretation on the recreational, natural, cultural, and historical resources within the project area and regionally;
 - E. Helping to provide for visitor safety and enjoyment; and
 - F. Educating the public about water resources, water conservation, and water safety.
2. **Definitions.**
- A. **Visitor Center.** A visitor center is a public educational facility or dedicated space within a building for interpretive displays, programs, services, and information. Visitor centers generally have support facilities and conveniences for the traveling public.
 - B. **Interpretation.** Interpretation is a combination of educational activities designed to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of presentations, original objects, firsthand experience, graphic illustrations, activities, or media designed to help people understand, appreciate, and care for the natural and cultural environment.
3. **Visitor Center Principles.** The following principles must be considered prior to planning, developing, upgrading, managing, and operating visitor centers:
- A. Through information, education, and interpretation, Reclamation has an opportunity to protect, conserve, and enhance recreational, natural, historical, and cultural resources. Visitor centers enhance the public's awareness and understanding of Reclamation's mission and stewardship responsibilities.
 - B. The appropriateness and suitability of a visitor center and the type of visitor center at a project will be assessed through a systematic and comprehensive interpretive planning process that defines the visitor center's messages, interpretive themes, interpretive tools and techniques, displays, programs, and services, consistent with Reclamation's Visual Identity Program Online Manual and inclusive of all potential visitor needs, including those with disabilities.
 - C. Visitor center design, construction, and maintenance will strive to integrate the principles of universal and sustainable design and energy conservation as appropriate and feasible.
 - D. Reclamation will strive to integrate authorized income-generating programs and services for the purposes of sustaining and enhancing the visitor center's programs, educational and interpretive activities, and operations, where authorized.

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- E. Reclamation and its partners, where appropriate, will strive to implement donation activities and a volunteer program for the purposes of developing and maintaining a visitor center and its program and services.
 - F. Reclamation will follow current professional interpretive practices, Federal accessibility regulations, and Reclamation's Visual Identity Program Online Manual in the design, fabrication, installation, and maintenance of interpretive displays, programs, and services.
 - G. Visitor centers will comply with the requirements and Accessibility Standards as set forth in the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, which provides for minimum access for visitors with disabilities.
 - H. Where feasible, visitor centers will be coordinated or integrated with those of Federal, state, or local agencies in the same geographic area.
 - I. Visitor centers will implement a periodic evaluation process to measure the effectiveness of the visitor center and its displays, programs, and services.
 - J. Reclamation will incorporate security into the design and operation of the visitor center. Visitor center staff will work with their regional security officers to ensure security of the site, employees, the visiting public, and any sensitive Reclamation information or property.
4. **Visitor Center Planning and Administration.**
- A. Reclamation and its managing partners will assess the current and potential recreation opportunities in the region through a formal planning process. The level of planning will be commensurate with the potential size, location, regional significance, anticipated visitation, or a combination of factors. This assessment must determine the availability of existing visitor centers and related facilities and programs (including fee systems) managed by local communities, state, and Federal agencies, and the private sector and consider alternatives to collaborate, where mutually beneficial. Where appropriate, Reclamation will partner with Federal and non-Federal entities, nonprofit cooperating associations, local community and civic groups, individual volunteers, and the private sector.
 - B. Reclamation's level of approval authority and oversight for the planning and administration of visitor centers with Federal and non-Federal partners will be addressed in a management agreement. The partnership arrangement will be defined in writing and include, at a minimum:
 - (1) performance specifications for the roles, responsibilities, and activities for all entities;

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- (2) the requirements for an annual program review, independent financial audits, and annual financial reports; and
 - (3) the means and timetable to modify or end the partnership arrangement.
5. **Supporting Laws, Regulations, Rules, Policies, and Directives and Standards.** This Policy is supported by the following:
- A. Accessibility Standards as set forth in the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968;
 - B. Randolph Shepard Act of 1936, as amended;
 - C. Concession Management Policy, LND P02;
 - D. Concession Management by Reclamation, LND 04-01;
 - E. Concession Management by Non-Federal Partners, LND 04-02;
 - F. Cultural Resources Management Policy, LND P01;
 - G. Cultural Resources Management Directives and Standards, LND 02-01;
 - H. Recreation Management Policy, LND P04;
 - I. Implementation of the Cost-Sharing Authorities for Recreation and Fish and Wildlife Enhancement, LND 01-01;
 - J. Visitor Center Directives and Standards, LND 13-01;
 - K. Visual Identity Policy, ADM P05;
 - L. Visual Identity Directives and Standards, ADM 02-01; ADM 02-02; ADM 02-05; ADM 03-01; ADM 05-01; ADM 05-02; ADM 05-03; ADM 05-04; CMP 03-01;
 - M. Occupational Safety and Health Program Policy, SAF P01;
 - N. Occupational Safety and Health Program Directives and Standards, SAF 01-01;
 - O. Visual Identity Program Online Manual; and
 - P. Departmental Manual, Museum Property Manual 411.
6. **Supporting Guidelines.** This Policy is supported by the following:
- A. Accessibility Program Guidance Manual;

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- B. Concession Management Guidelines;
- C. Recreation Facility Design Guidelines;
- D. Sign Guidelines; and
- E. Visitor Center Guidelines.