

THE
FUTURE
OF
AMERICA'S
NATIONAL
PARKS

First Annual
Centennial Strategy for

Valley Forge National Historical Park

August 2007

CENTENNIAL INITIATIVE



Site: VAFO

Year: 2007

Vision Statement

A Shared Vision

When citizens joined together in the 1870s to protect Valley Forge, their common vision was preservation of a meaningful place that inspired the Continental Army, and that continued to inspire Americans a century later. Since the park's founding, citizens have repeatedly come together to contribute, advocate, and protect its treasures from threats. The tradition of citizen stewardship continues today as volunteers and partners participate in the ongoing work of preservation and interpretation. Each shares the vision of the park as a meaningful place of inspiration, refuge, commemoration, release, and pleasure.

Citizens always have demanded the highest level of stewardship for this important place and continue to do so. During the planning process for the GMP, the park and stakeholders clarified our shared vision: Valley Forge must be a place where citizens understand, care for, and preserve their history and natural heritage; a place where life-long education is compelling; and a place that is a vital and valued part of the community.

Valley Forge NHP now is focused on better organizing management of the park to promote citizen stewardship, preserve and restore historic and natural resources, and provide an excellent visitor experience. The park has re-positioned itself to make strategic use of the many partnership and cooperative resources available regionally. We also are investing time to build a community dedicated to conserving the park for the future.

Valley Forge NHP has moved away from the traditional model in which NPS employees themselves implement all objectives, to a model in which NPS employees take on the role of facilitator. In this model, we are more effectively taking advantage of abundant outside resources such as volunteers, partners, and grants. Rather than "doing it by ourselves," each staff member is enabled to multiply his/her effort through outreach. We understand that partners, volunteers, and the community want opportunities to participate more actively in conserving the park. Organizing the staff to enable this creates a cadre of stewards at every level—people and organizations that, through participation, will move from interest to understanding to caring to advocacy. This is the single most important action in preserving the park for the future.

Park/ Superintendent/ Program Manager

Mike Caldwell

Improve the condition of park resources and assets.

Rehabilitate high-priority historic buildings to good condition, and help communities to preserve their history through programs like Preserve America.

The park strategically uses project funds, staff, partnerships, leasing, and volunteers to rehabilitate high-priority historic buildings. The park's new GMP lays out a prioritized path to complete rehabilitation of all historic buildings and keep them in good condition. Valley Forge NHP will continue to strategically use project funds, partnerships, leasing and volunteers on buildings park-wide.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

Restore native habitats by controlling invasive species and reintroducing key plant and animal species.

The park restores native habitats through addressing two key issues—the presence of exotic invasives and over-abundant white-tailed deer. The park uses extensive volunteer contributions and works annually with the NPS Eastern Plant Management Team to control exotic invasive plants. The park will work with EPMT in 2007 to complete a strategic plan for prioritized control of invasives. This will enable increased use of volunteers to manage invasives.

The park initiated an EIS to manage the size of the deer herd in the park and to plan for restoration of the park's forests following implementation beginning in FY09, including re-introduction of the full suite of plants that were endemic to the forests prior to over-browsing.

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Improve high-priority assets to acceptable condition, as measured by the Facility Condition Index.

In the new GMP the park has identified those high priority assets that are core to the mission and enhance the visitor experience. The park is focused on improving the condition of our visitor use facilities, significant historic assets and trails.

The park is embarking on the second phase of a \$6 million rehabilitation of the Washington Headquarters area which will provide greater visitor access to the site, enhanced visitor experience and improved FCI.

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Site: VAFO

STEWARDSHIP

Improve the condition of park resources and assets.

Improve the natural resources in parks, as measured by the vital signs developed under the Natural Resource Challenge.

Prioritization and selection of vital signs was completed in 2006, in cooperation with the Mid-Atlantic Inventory and Monitoring Network. The top vital signs selected for the park are weather, climate, forest health, white-tailed deer, water quality and dynamics, grassland plant communities, and breeding birds. Long-term monitoring of vital signs is being implemented by both the I&M Program and the park. Initiation of monitoring related to all vital signs is expected by 2009. The results of monitoring will be used to identify management and information needs and to inform development of management documents.

Improving the condition of natural resources at the park is facilitated through use of information in an adaptive management approach.

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Complete all cultural resource inventories for designated priority resources.

The park has completed all cultural resource inventories and will continue to use them for preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration of our nationally significant resources .

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STEWARDSHIP

Serve as the Preeminent resource laboratory by applying excellence in science and scholarship to understand and respond to environmental changes.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

The location of the park in an urban-suburban environment and the presence of significant natural resources and resource issues provides many unique opportunities for scientific investigation and serving as a resource laboratory. Valley Forge has an active scientific research program and is now attempting to better direct research efforts toward park information needs. In 2006, a total of 10 permits to conduct research were issued or remain active on topics such as air and water temperature monitoring in streams, collection of data for the state breeding bird atlas, genetic and assessment of a newly discovered crayfish in park streams, and development of the White-tailed Deer Management Plan/EIS. Data and information provided through science and scholarship have been and will continue to be used to inform management and improve understanding of relationships between resource condition and changes in surrounding environment. Additionally, in 2007-2008, park staff will be working with local universities and partners to develop comprehensive lists and descriptions of research needs to facilitate a connection between park needs and researchers.

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ENVIRONMENT

Engage partners, communities, and visitors in shared environmental stewardship.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Valley Forge is committed to the development of partnerships and volunteerism. The result has been a significant increase in the number of volunteer hours (380% growth in natural resource volunteer hours from 2005 to 2006) and partners work with the park in our efforts to improve resource protection. The park has worked to establish new multi-faceted partnerships with organizations such as John James Audubon Center at Mill Grove. The park and partner have developed a joint nomination as an Important Bird Area and conducted a joint volunteer training that has facilitated sharing of cross trained volunteers between our sites. In 2007, the park initiated a natural resource internship program that will be expanded over the coming years, as well as the creation of a natural resource interpretation volunteer program.

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RECREATION

- Encourage collaboration among and assist park and recreation systems at every level—federal, regional, state, local—to help build an outdoor recreation network accessible to all Americans.
- Rehabilitate over 2,000 miles of trails within or connected to national parks, including trails accessible to those with disabilities.

The park is implementing the rehabilitation recommendations of a recent trail assessment for park trails and also the findings of our new GMP to provide excellent trail experiences within the park, and to expand connectivity with regional trails.

Within the park we will complete the few missing links that make the most of our existing trail system, and also provide appropriate trailhead facilities and information. We are working with neighboring counties and township to make connections between the park system and local and regional trails. When these connections are completed, the park will be directly linked to hundreds of miles of regional walking and biking trails.

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RECREATION

- Establish "volun-tourism" excursions to national parks for volunteers to help achieve natural and cultural resource protection goals.
- Increase annual volunteer hours by 100 percent, from 5.2 million hours to 10.4 million hours.

In Fiscal Year 06 the number of volunteer hours contributed to Valley Forge increased to 26,506, a 32.5% increase over the previous year. The park has reorganized current staff and operations to facilitate volunteerism and built participation, and future increases are expected. The park annually participates in the Sierra Club's Outdoor Excursions program in which volunteers from around the country live in the park and contribute services as well as enjoy special programs and activities. A new cooperative agreement with the Appalachian Mountain Club will build to similar results, and there are other opportunities to increase volunteer participation.

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RECREATION

Expand partnerships with schools and boys and girls associations to show how national park experiences can improve children's lives.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Valley Forge is significant for its historic and natural resources, and there also is extensive recreational use of the park. Park management reorganized and expanded programs for school children in FY07 and saw a great increase in participation. Programs emphasize resources and the benefits of outdoor recreation. Insert Park Text

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RECREATION

Focus national, regional, and local tourism efforts to reach diverse audiences and young people and to attract visitors to lesser-known parks.

Increase visitation by 25 percent at lesser-known parks through a national tourism effort aimed at helping people to discover the breadth of parks and experiences.

Valley Forge is not a "lesser-known park," although with cutbacks in history education in the schools, fewer people than ever understand the significance of what happened here. A new cooperative agreement with the Valley Forge Visitors and Convention Bureau provides staff and exceptional outreach to take the story to potential and electronic visitors and ensure that visitation remains robust.

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Increase the number of visitors that attend ranger-facilitated programs such as campfire talks, hikes, and school programs.

The park continues to better organize operations to ensure that rangers are on the ground and reaching visitors. Through a growing partnership with Once Upon A Nation, a private, non-profit educational and interpretive organization, the number of visitors reached in facilitated programs by park rangers and Once Upon A Nation staff is increasing geometrically. Greater use of Student Conservation Association and other interns extends our reach to visitors. A much broader palette of activities and programs, both conceived and operated with partners, has more than doubled the number of visitors reached since two years ago.

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EDUCATION

Cooperate with educators to provide curriculum materials, high-quality programs, and park-based and online learning.

Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

Building on the success of our current annual teachers' institutes on the American Revolution, we will begin an annual institute that supports regional teachers in using this park as a classroom for science and natural resource education. We will work with a local university, local school districts, and individual teachers to develop the institute.

This year, Valley Forge completed facilitation of "Honored Places," the NPS Teacher's Guide to the American Revolution, now available in hard copy, DVD, and on the web.

One existing park FTE was re-allocated in FY07 to develop state standards-based curriculum materials for natural resources. These materials will begin to be available in FY08.

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EDUCATION

Introduce young people and their families to national parks by using exciting media and technology.

Increase the number of web hits through the introduction of advanced, interactive features that attract young people to national parks.

Beginning in 2006, Valley Forge NHP developed a cell phone tour which provides 24/7 messages about key stories and resources. Pod casts also have been developed and are on-line now. Park staff and partners continually evaluate the effectiveness of these messages and add more each month.

The park is working with partners to develop an interactive DVD—a "virtual tour" of the park, which will be completed in FY08. The park is working with partners to complete redevelopment of the popular driving tour, which will come out on CD this year and as a DVD with additional images and links next year. In addition, the park is working with partners to develop a new multimedia program for the newly renovated visitor contact area at Washington's Headquarters, the park's premier historic site.

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EDUCATION

Promote life-long learning to connect generations through park experiences.

Enroll an additional two million children in the Junior Ranger program.

Current Junior Ranger program was developed almost 20 years ago. This summer, a Junior Ranger Ambassador intern is completely revamping the program. Our opportunity to engage youngsters in a meaningful way in learning and understanding the park's stories and appreciating its natural and cultural resources is enormous. Our future program will help children make personal connections with the natural and cultural meanings of the park and understand the shared heritage this place embodies.

Program targets children 8-12 living in communities bordering the park. This is the age group for which exploring the cultural and natural resources of the park complements and reinforces their school studies most. A special emphasis will be placed on reaching Hispanic and African American children in communities within a short distance of the park who have not traditionally visited in significant numbers. That is changing in part because of the growing trail network that connects the park to its surrounding communities.

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Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)

All volunteer programs at the park will continue to include an educational component. Volunteers of all ages have self-selected to be here, and the park provides special gatherings, talks, and trips in order to encourage and reward volunteers at every level.

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PROFESSIONALISM

Be one of the top 10 places to work in America.

Meet 100 percent of diversity recruitment goals by employing people who reflect the face of America.

At Valley Forge, we believe not only that staff diversity is essential to continuing to make the park a vital and valued part of the community, but also that it is essential to develop a cadre of future environmental leaders. In FY07, the park increased our use of young interns by 30% over FY06. We have and will continue to recruit diverse interns from our community and beyond.

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Attain the highest employee satisfaction rate of all federal agencies, as measured by Office of Personnel Management surveys.

A sense of belonging, purpose, and being able to make a difference is fundamental to employee satisfaction. The park's new GMP states that we will move away from a traditional model in which NPS employees themselves implement all objectives, to a model in which NPS employees take on the role of facilitator. In this model, we are more effectively taking advantage of abundant outside resources such as volunteers, partners, and grants. Rather than "doing it by ourselves," each staff member is enabled to multiply his/her effort through outreach. Staff will be seen and will see themselves not only as experts, but also as collaborators willing to share responsibility and knowledge with citizens.

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PROFESSIONALISM

- Make national parks the first choice in philanthropic giving among those concerned about environmental, cultural, and recreational values.**
- Improve communications and marketing capacity to increase public understanding of our mission, opportunities, and benefits.**

The park has developed attractive and concise annual reports and packages of case statements that present the accomplishments and showcase the role of philanthropy in achieving the mission. The packages have been well received and have generated numerous inquiries and donations.

Our marketing partnership with the Valley Forge Visitors and Convention Bureau continues to expand the reach of our messages.

Beginning in FY08, the park will launch two campaigns to endow resources that are very important to visitors: Trails Forever, and Trees Forever. We will work with partners to develop capacity to launch and manage these campaigns.

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