

GMP Dynamic Sourcebook - Appendix D: Public Involvement

D.7 Examples of Public Involvement Strategies

Canyon de Chelly: Example of Scoping Methods to Overcome Government, Cultural, and Language Barriers

Canyon de Chelly National Monument, located in northeastern Arizona, is situated entirely on Navajo Nation tribal trust lands. Roughly 40 Navajo families reside within and along the rims of the Canyon. Although the NPS administers the monument, the NPS and the Navajo Nation share many resource responsibilities and face mutual issues that frequently cross administrative boundaries. These unique factors required the GMP scoping efforts to include meetings with representatives of various Navajo Nation governmental departments (i.e. Parks and Recreation, Historic Preservation, Environmental Protection), meetings at local Navajo chapter houses in Chinle and nearby communities, other governmental agencies (i.e. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Natural Resources Conservation Service), and meetings with the general public in Chinle, Tsaile, Window Rock, Gallup, Farmington, and Flagstaff. Equally important were a series of meetings that the park held specifically with the resident canyon community.

From these scoping meetings, the GMP team was informed how the lack of useable water, erosion, and the spread of non-native vegetation (Russian Olive and tamarisk trees) threaten the watershed and ultimately the traditional Navajo way of life within the canyons. Conflicts between efforts to retain the privacy and livelihoods of canyon residents while accommodating increasing visitation and commercial tour operations pose additional challenges for the park and GMP planners. A summary of the responses received from the scoping meetings is presented in the August, 2004 GMP newsletter

Among the obstacles encountered by the GMP team during the Canyon de Chelly scoping process were having to gain familiarity with (and appropriate/timely access to) the multiple levels of the Navajo Nation tribal government with its inherent bureaucratic structure. Meetings and communication with different representatives at different times were sometimes necessary within a single department, and it was not uncommon to have widely divergent views expressed by different departments and representatives. Cultural and language differences sometimes hampered effective communications. But these differences were not insurmountable. The Park Service acknowledged the authority of the Navajo Nation to address issues in the monument and showed a willingness to be open, to listen to what the Navajo people were saying, and to recognize that the park and tribe had mutual concerns. The planning team focused on the key issues that were of concern in the park and did not get involved in tribal politics or support one faction over another. The team met several times with lots of people.

The willingness of the GMP team to listen to and reach out to the Navajo Nation in attempts to resolve issues of mutual concern were well-received. The park's meetings with the resident canyon community were particularly effective, and community members frequently expressed their appreciation that the NPS was willing to strengthen its ties with the community and actively respond to their issues. At these meetings, Navajo NPS employees often translated for those community members who spoke only Navajo, which further helped build trust and rapport.

The biggest success to date has been on a watershed initiative, which the NPS facilitated. The future of the watershed is a key issue for local residents, the Navajo Nation, and the Park Service. A group of NPS employees studied the watershed for a week and the Park Service took concrete steps to implement many of the recommendations of the study group. Working with local residents and the tribe, the Park Service has started to address several key problems facing the watershed, including the spread of nonnative species and the control of erosion.