



Blue Ridge Parkway News

Dear Neighbors and Visitors,

I would like to announce the start of a comprehensive planning effort for the Blue Ridge Parkway. This multiyear project will result in the production of the park's first General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement. All units of the national park system are required to have a general management plan. Now, with recent funding, the park has the opportunity to step back, examine its long-range goals and management issues, and chart a course for its future.

Parkway construction began in 1935 and was not fully realized until the dedication of the Linn Cove Viaduct in 1987. Now that most of the infrastructure is completed, the focus of management is shifting to helping ensure that the park's scenic, natural, cultural, and recreational qualities are protected and preserved. The challenges are many. The park encompasses 82,000 acres of federal land and has more than 1,000 miles of boundary to manage. There are also 4,000 adjacent landowners, 29 county governments and several town and city governments to interact with, 500,000 acres of scenic landscape outside its boundary, and 181 access points from regional roads.

With your help, the planning process for the general management plan will explore what range of resource conditions and visitor experiences should be achieved and maintained over time for the Blue Ridge Parkway. Adjacent land uses and transportation improvements, their effect on park resources and visitors, and strategies for cooperation among public and private land managers will also be explored.

I sincerely invite your participation in this planning effort. There will be several opportunities to contribute your ideas and concerns about the park. Planning newsletters with comment forms will be distributed to the project mailing list and posted on the Internet. There will be public workshops and meetings at key planning stages. And, when the Draft General Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement is produced, you will be invited to review and comment on it.

To help us update the project mailing list, please use the attached comment form.

Thank you, and I look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Brown".

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Superintendent

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

General Management Planning

Park planning is a decision-making process, and general management planning is the broadest level of decision making for national parks.

General management plans are required for all units in the national park system and are intended to set the park's management direction for the next 15 to 20 years. The general management plan for the Blue Ridge Parkway is being coordinated by a core team of park staff and NPS planning professionals. Participation by the full park staff, park partners and neighbors, and the general public will be crucial to the planning effort's success.

Planning in the national park system is organized around three primary questions: **WHY** was this park established (what is the overall mission of this park)? **WHAT** is the vision for the park's future (what kind of place do we want it to be)? and **HOW** do we accomplish our future vision (what actions are needed to create the desired future conditions)?

Why was this park established?

Answers to the **WHY** question form the foundation for the plan. All concepts and actions in the plan must be consistent with this foundation because it is based on legislation and NPS policy. For the Blue Ridge Parkway, the planning foundation begins with statements of park mission, purpose, and significance that are presented in draft in this newsletter. Your comments will help us refine these statements. The planning team will refer to the planning foundation to direct and test each step of the plan as it progresses. Park managers will use the foundation statements to help make operational decisions long after the plan itself is completed.



What is the vision for the future of this park?

Developing a vision for the park's future (answering the **WHAT** question) is the primary role of the general management plan. It is on this step that the planning team spends the most time and where ideas and comments from you are the most important. The general management plan looks years into the future and considers the park holistically in its full ecological and cultural context and as part of the surrounding region. Several possible visions for the park's future (called alternatives) are developed and analyzed before a preferred direction is selected. Evaluating a set of alternatives enables us to compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of one course of action over another, and provide the sound approach to decision making required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

How do we accomplish our vision for the future?

Although it may be necessary in some cases to include specific actions in the general management plan, most **HOW** questions are answered in future implementation plans. For example, the desired conditions to be achieved for the park's natural and cultural resources will be described in the general management plan, but specific actions to manage resources will be identified in resource management plans. Overall goals and conditions to be met by the park's interpretive and educational programs will be established in the general management plan, but specific themes and required media or other facilities will be detailed in an interpretative plan. Any current implementation plans for the park will be evaluated and revised as necessary to be consistent with the new general management plan.

The Blue Ridge Parkway's general management plan process is expected to take several years to complete. A summary of the process and anticipated time frame are presented below. You will have opportunities to share ideas and comments throughout the process.



We
Are
Here

Step and Timeframe	Planning Activity	Participation Opportunities
1 Fall 2001	Initiate Project The planning team assembles, begins to identify the project's scope, customizes the planning process, and begins to establish contacts with participants.	
2 Winter 2001-Summer 2002	Define Planning Context and Foundation The team examines WHY the park was established and affirms the park's mission, purpose, and significance. Team members collect and analyze relevant data and public comments.	Read newsletters and send us comments. Help us build a mailing list.
3 Summer 2002-Summer 2003	Develop and Evaluate Alternatives Using staff and public input, the team explores WHAT the park's future should look like and proposes a range of reasonable alternatives.	Read newsletters and send us your ideas and comments. Come to public meetings.
4 Fall 2003-Fall 2004	Prepare a Draft Document A draft general management plan and environmental impact statement is published. The draft document describes the alternatives and the impacts of implementing each. Based on the impacts and public input, a preferred alternative is identified in the document.	Read the draft plan and send us your ideas and comments.
5 Winter 2004-Summer 2005	Publish Final Document Based on review by the National Park Service and the public, the team revises the <i>General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement</i> and distributes a final plan. The plan is approved in a published Record of Decision.	Read the final plan, including NPS responses to substantive public comments and official letters.
6 Summer 2005 and beyond	Implement the Approved Plan After the Record of Decision is issued, and as funding allows, the general management plan is implemented.	



Blue Ridge Parkway

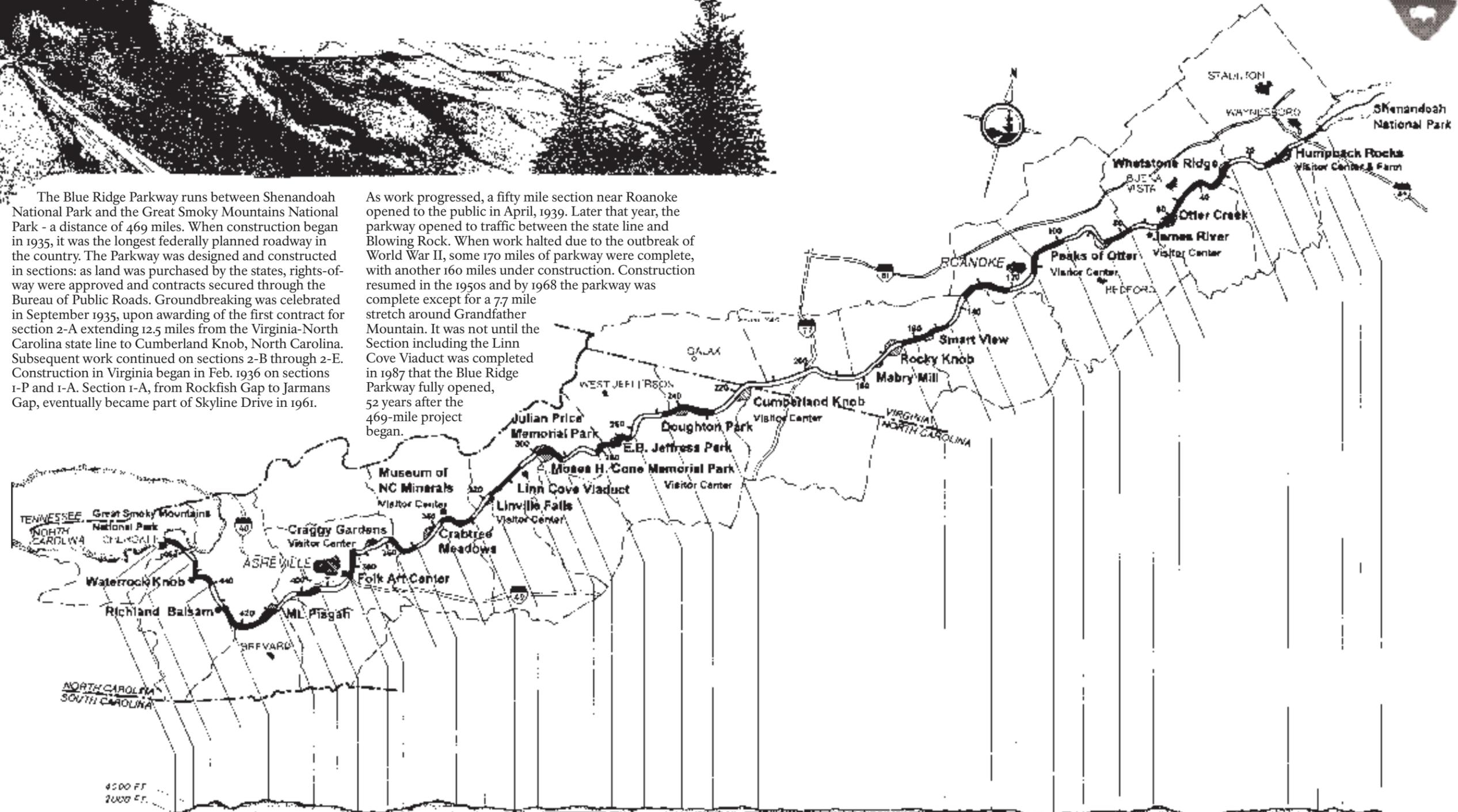
Virginia to North Carolina

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



The Blue Ridge Parkway runs between Shenandoah National Park and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park - a distance of 469 miles. When construction began in 1935, it was the longest federally planned roadway in the country. The Parkway was designed and constructed in sections: as land was purchased by the states, rights-of-way were approved and contracts secured through the Bureau of Public Roads. Groundbreaking was celebrated in September 1935, upon awarding of the first contract for section 2-A extending 12.5 miles from the Virginia-North Carolina state line to Cumberland Knob, North Carolina. Subsequent work continued on sections 2-B through 2-E. Construction in Virginia began in Feb. 1936 on sections 1-P and 1-A. Section 1-A, from Rockfish Gap to Jarman's Gap, eventually became part of Skyline Drive in 1961.

As work progressed, a fifty mile section near Roanoke opened to the public in April, 1939. Later that year, the parkway opened to traffic between the state line and Blowing Rock. When work halted due to the outbreak of World War II, some 170 miles of parkway were complete, with another 160 miles under construction. Construction resumed in the 1950s and by 1968 the parkway was complete except for a 7.7 mile stretch around Grandfather Mountain. It was not until the Section including the Linn Cove Viaduct was completed in 1987 that the Blue Ridge Parkway fully opened, 52 years after the 469-mile project began.



COMPLETED	37	42	1940	1962	1955	38	43	1967	32	1950	41	1940	1939	1941	1940	37	30	1938	1937	1939	1938	1935	1930	1943	1950	1941	1940	1941	1942	1940	1941	40														
SECTIONS	2-I	2-Y	2-X	2-W	2-V	2-U	2-T	2-S	2-R	2-Q	2-P	2-N	2-M	2-L	2-K	2-J	2-I	2-G	2-F	2-E	2-D	2-C	2-B	2-A	1-W	1-V	1-U	1-T	1-S	1-R	1-Q	1-P	1-N	1-M	1-L	1-K	1-J	1-I	1-H	1-G	1-F	1-E	1-D	1-C	1-B	1-A
SHEET	BALSAM MOUNTAINS										BLACK MOUNTAINS					HIGHLANDS					PLATEAU					RIDGE																				
STATE	NORTH CAROLINA															VIRGINIA																														

Mission, Purpose, and Significance of the Blue Ridge Parkway

Mission Statement

The Blue Ridge Parkway, in linking the Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks, is dedicated to enhancing the outstanding scenic and recreational qualities of the corridor that it traverses, conserving unimpaired its significant natural and cultural resources, and promoting in perpetuity the public enjoyment and appreciation of the central and southern Appalachian mountains.

Purpose Statements

The legislated purpose of the Blue Ridge Parkway, under the act of June 30, 1936, is to link Shenandoah National Park in Virginia and Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina and Tennessee by way of a recreation-oriented motor road intended for public use and enjoyment. Under the provisions of the act approved August 25, 1916 (39 Stat. 535), the intended purpose of the Blue Ridge Parkway is to conserve, interpret, and exhibit the unique natural and cultural resources of the central and southern Appalachian Mountains, as well as provide for leisure motor travel through a variety of environments.

The general interpretation of the Parkway's purpose has been refined into the following more specific purpose statements:

- Connect Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks by way of a “national rural parkway” — a recreational, destination-oriented motor road traveling through a variety of scenic ridge, mountainside, and pastoral farm landscape.
- Conserve the scenery and preserve the natural and cultural resources of the Parkway's designed and natural areas.
- Provide for public enjoyment and understanding of the natural resources and cultural heritage of the central and southern Appalachian Mountains.
- Provide opportunities for high quality scenic and recreational experiences along the Blue Ridge Parkway and within the corridor through which it passes.

Significance Statements

The route of the Blue Ridge Parkway follows mountain and valley landscapes to link Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks. Its location was selected to provide the best in a variety of scenic, historic, and natural features that evoke the regional image of the central and southern Appalachian Mountains. To maximize scenic views and give visitors the impression that they are in a park with boundaries to the horizon, the parkway was located in mountainous terrain that normal roads would have avoided.

The parkway extends 469 miles through the Blue Ridge, Black, Great Craggy, Great Balsam, and Plot Balsam Mountains. It is known for spectacular mountain and valley vistas, quiet pastoral scenes, sparkling waterfalls, colorful flowers and foliage displays, and interpretation of mountain history and culture. Designed for recreational driving, the parkway provides visitors with quiet, leisure travel, free from commercial traffic and the congestion of high-speed highways. As its All-American Road status indicates, it is one of the most diverse and high-quality recreational driving experiences in the world.

The following significance statements summarize the importance or distinctiveness of the aggregate of resources along the parkway:

- The Blue Ridge Parkway was the first national rural parkway to be conceived, designed, and constructed as a leisure-type driving experience. Its varied topography and numerous vista points offer easy public access to spectacular views of southern Appalachian rural landscapes and forested mountains.
- As an example of pre- and post-war automotive rural parkway design, the Blue Ridge Parkway retains the greatest degree of integrity of any parkway in the United States. The parkway is further recognized throughout the world as an international example of landscape and engineering design achievements with a roadway that lays easily on the land and blends into the landscape.
- The parkway is the highest and longest continuous route in the Appalachian area. Along its 469-mile length the parkway provides scenic access to crests and ridges of five major ranges within the central and southern Appalachian Mountains, encompassing geographic and vegetative zones that range from 649 feet at James River in Virginia to 6,053 feet at Richland Balsam in North Carolina.
- The park's uninterrupted corridor facilitates the protection of a diverse range of flora and fauna including rare and endangered plant and animal species and areas designated as national natural landmarks.
- The park preserves and displays cultural landscapes and historic architecture characteristic of the central and southern Appalachian highlands.
- The Blue Ridge Parkway is a primary catalyst for promoting regional travel and tourism, serving as a unifying element for 29 counties through which it passes, engendering a shared regional identity, providing a common link of interest, and being a major contributor to regional economic vitality.

Determining the Plan's Scope

In this newsletter we are asking for your input about the WHY question - why was this park established? In our next newsletter we will be seeking your input on the WHAT question - what kind of place do you want this park to be? To better understand the public's vision(s) for the park, an important planning step is to identify those issues and concerns that the plan should address. By understanding the major issues, the National Park Service will be better able to develop and analyze an appropriate range of planning alternatives.

The process of identifying GMP issues began this fall with some initial discussions with park staff and county planners in Virginia and North Carolina. This effort will continue into the summer 2002. There will be contacts and meetings with government agencies, organizations, visitors, and local communities and residents. The newsletter to follow this one will specifically request your input on issues, and public meetings in the summer 2002 will provide

another, more interactive opportunity for you to voice your interests and concerns.

Some of the early planning issues that have been identified include the following:

- Public understanding of the park as a national park system unit.
- The original parkway design and the challenges to protect and maintain it.
- The role of the park in the central/southern Appalachian ecosystem.
- Development outside park boundaries and its effects on park resources, the visitor's experience, and the local economy.
- Parkway traffic/safety—local access, traffic levels, winter closings, road markings.
- The role of the park in providing visitors information about adjacent services (gas, food, lodging, etc.).
- Bicycling on the parkway.

- The adequacy of parkway infrastructure to provide for visitors needs and efficient park operations.
- Finding the balance between educational opportunities and commercial services on the parkway.
- The increasing size of recreational vehicles (RVs) and the ability of the parkway to accommodate them.
- Campground design, facilities, and use levels.
- Illegal taking of park resources such as rare plants, animals.
- Wildlife habitat fragmentation from roads, trails, and development.

Again, the next newsletter will explore planning issues and ideas for the park's future in more depth. In the meantime, on the attached comment form please provide us your comments about the park's purpose and significance statements and check to ensure we have your correct mailing address.



Blue Ridge Parkway

(You may also comment via the Internet at: blri_gmp_eis@nps.gov)

Do the mission and purpose statements reflect your sense of why the park was created and its role in the national park system? If not, tell us why.

Do the significance statements capture your sense of why the park is important? If not, tell us why you think the park is important.