Morristown National Historical Park

Summary of the Plan

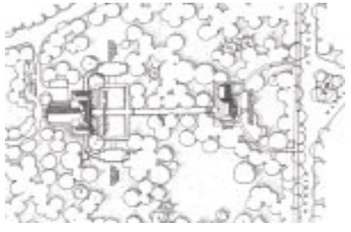
Background

The new draft General Management Plan/ Environmental Impact Statement for Morristown National Historical Park proposes a long–term approach to managing the park, consistent with the park's mission and NPS policy and other laws and regulations, over the next 15 to 20 years. Morristown National Historical Park, the first national historical park in the national park system, was established in 1933 to preserve the lands and resources associated with the winter encampments of the Continental Army during the War for Independence. At Morristown, General George Washington demonstrated his superb leadership by holding the army together despite seemingly overwhelming difficulties; and his officers and men demonstrated their fortitude and dedication.

The park is comprised of 1,697.55 acres situated in north central New Jersey, approximately 30 miles west of New York City. The park contains four separate units, each of which is associated with the Revolutionary War winter encampments of the Continental Army.

The current master plan for the park was completed in 1976. Although it continues to be used as a general guide for operations, it is no longer adequate to address the policy and operational issues facing park managers. Since the completion of the 1976 plan, there have been a number of significant changes in the park's resources, visitors, and setting, in addition to changes in NPS policy—most of which were not anticipated in 1976.
Among the major issues identified during the GMP process are the need to:

- Improve the protection and use of the park's museum and collections.
- Plan for the sustainable management of park forests as a dynamic ecological resource.
- Direct the management of the park's cultural landscapes (a type of resource barely recognized in 1976).
- Protect the historic setting and scenic beauty of park lands from adjacent development.
- Direct the management of lands added to the park since the previous plan.
- Protect park lands from sound and air pollution, especially that generated by Interstate-287.
- Support enhanced interpretation of the winter encampments and other important historic values.
- Interpret the historical aspects of the park to visitors primarily interested in its scenic and recreational qualities.
- Evaluate the potential for a park–town shuttle transportation system.
- Examine the park's role in historical, recreational, and conservation initiatives in the region.



Under Alternatives B and C, the museum, designed by noted architect John Russell Pope in the 1930s, could be rehabilitated and expanded. The setting of the Ford Mansion, Washington's historic headquarters, would be protected.

Alternatives

After completing extensive research and consulting with the public and with park partners, the planning team developed three management alternatives for the park. Each alternative provides a cohesive rationale that shapes a vision for the park's resources and visitors. Although the philosophies are different, each alternative is consistent with the park's legislation, supports the park's mission, and is feasible. The alternatives share many proposals, but take different approaches to addressing some of the main issues and would thus have differing physical consequences.

Alternative A presents the so-called "no action" alternative required by law. This alternative represents a comparative baseline. Current practices would continue with current plans remaining in force. All projects under approved plans could be carried out; however, it might be difficult to respond to conditions that have changed since the 1976 master plan. Actions that might likely result from adopting this alternative include:

- Modest improvements are made to the museum for collections storage and exhibits.
- Forest management continues to be limited.
- Interpretation remains centered on the encampments.
- An interpretive shuttle is developed in Jockey Hollow.
- Land acquisition is limited to existing acreage ceiling; up to 8.56 acres
- Participation in regional initiatives is minor.

Estimated costs: $2.35-2.8 million for annual operations *(the 2002 budget was $2.13 million)*; $2.8-3.35 million for planning and construction; and $1.5-2.0 million for land acquisition.

Implementation of Alternative A would likely have major, adverse, long-term impacts on historic landscapes (due to unmanaged change in the historic forest, and loss of potentially significant commemorative features), and on the collections, because storage conditions would remain inadequate. There would likely be major, adverse, long-term impacts to park vegetation due to unmanaged change in the historic forest. Inadequate facilities, confusing circulation, and a narrow interpretive focus would have an adverse long-term impact on visitor experience. Major, beneficial, long-term impacts could result from implementing an interpretive shuttle in Jockey Hollow. Inefficient administrative space and a restrictive scope for partnerships would produce an adverse but minor impact on park operations. Inadequate collections storage facilities, the changing forest character, harmful development on adjacent land under this alternative would threaten the sustainability of park resources and values.

New interpretive exhibits could be designed for Fort Nonsense, complementing the expansive vistas from the hilltop.

Alternative B would suggest, to the fullest extent possible, the character of the park during the encampment period of 1777–82. It recognizes that a completely faithful restoration of those conditions is unattainable and, in some ways, undesirable. This alternative attempts to create a meaningful visitor experience through direct contact with the physical landscape conditions encountered during the encampments. Paradoxically, although it seeks to evoke a less complex time, this alternative could scape vignettes are created along historic road corridors in Jockey Hollow to suggesting aspect of the encampments.

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Summary Continued

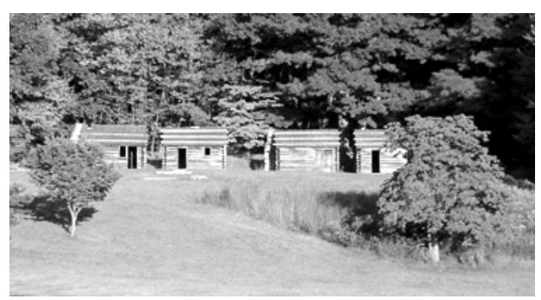
Alternatives (continued)

Paradoxically, although it seeks to evoke a less complex time, this alternative could entail the most extensive alteration of existing conditions. Actions that might likely result from adopting this alternative include:

- The museum is rehabilitated and a 5,000–10,000 square foot addition is constructed to improve collections storage and exhibits. The proposed locations for the addition are either at the rear of the museum or along either side, set back from its south facade.
- A cultural landscape treatment plan integrates cultural and natural resource management objectives to protect cultural resources, historic character and sustain the park's mixed hardwood forest.
- Interpretation centers exclusively on the encampments. *(Similar to Alternative A.)* Landscape vignettes are created along historic road corridors in Jockey Hollow to suggesting aspects of the encampments.
- A park-town shuttle is developed with partners to serve multiple units.
- The acreage ceiling is increased to permit acquisition of up to 500 acres on a willing-seller basis to protect park resources and values.
- The park is a leader in regional initiatives.

Estimated costs: $2.75-3.25 million for annual operations; $11.0-13.25 million for planning and construction *($3.5-5.0 million potentially donated)*; and up to $35 million for land acquisition *(half potentially donated)*.

Implementation of Alternative B would have a cumulative major beneficial impact on cultural resources, resulting from landscape and museum rehabilitation, increased acreage ceiling, integrated management of the forest, and increased stabilization of archeological resources. Removal of potentially significant commemorative resources, such as the Caretaker's Cottage would have Long-term impacts of undetermined type and intensity. There would likely be major, beneficial, long-term impacts to park vegetation due to integrated management of the forest. Landscape and museum rehabilitation, improved forest management, improved orientation, new landscape vignettes, treatment of ecological themes, and implementation of a park-town shuttle would be expected to have a major long-term beneficial impact on visitor experience. Park operations impacts would be beneficial, minor-moderate and long term resulting from increased staff, improved administrative space and greater scope for partnerships. Increased visitation, staff and new projects under this alternative would likely have a beneficial long-term impact on the socioeconomic environment. Proper collections storage facilities, increased stabilization of archeological resources, sustaining the historic character of the forest and increased land protection would have a beneficial overall effect on sustainability.



Alternatives B and C could develop innovative plans to sustain the park's mixed hardwood forest, a popular recreational resource, and once home to some 10,000 troops during the severe winter of 1779–80.

Alternative C would emphasize the encampment period; however, it would also recognize the efforts of successive generations (1873–1942) to protect, interpret, and commemorate that period. It would rely more on interpretive methods to present a scene evocative of the encampment period. This alternative would also preserve selected 19th and 20th century conditions and features added to the historic scene, and might draw on them to illustrate the history of the park resources. Alternative C has been identified as the preferred alternative. Actions that might likely result from adopting this alternative include:

- The museum is rehabilitated and a 5,000–10,000 square-foot addition is constructed to improve collections storage and exhibits. *(Same as Alternative B.)* The proposed locations for the addition are along either side of the museum *(as in Alternative B)* and may extend south of its south facade.
- A cultural landscape treatment plan integrates cultural and natural resource management objectives to protect cultural resources, historic character and sustain the park's mixed hardwood forest. *(Same as Alternative B; however, landscape vignettes are not created in Jockey Hollow.)*
- Interpretation remains centered on the encampments, but treats other themes, including commemoration and historic preservation.
- A park-town shuttle is developed with partners to serve multiple units. *(Same as Alternative B.)*
- The acreage ceiling is increased to permit acquisition of up to 500 acres on a willing-seller basis to protect park resources and values. *(Same as Alternative B.)*
- The park is a leader in regional initiatives. *(Same as Alternative B.)*

Estimated costs: $2.75-3.25 million for annual operations; $10.0-12.0 million for planning and construction *($3.5-5.0 potentially donated)*; and up to $35 million for land acquisition *(half potentially donated)*.

Impacts on cultural resources would be the same as Alternative B; however, potentially significant commemorative resources would not be removed. On natural resources, impacts would be the same as Alternative B; however, landscape vignettes would not be developed. Impacts on all other aspects of the park from this alternative would be the same as Alternative B. As the environmentally preferred alternative, Alternative C will cause the least damage to the biological and physical environment and will best protect, preserve, and enhance historic, cultural, and natural resources.

Next Steps

After the public review period is completed, the planning team will prepare a final General Management Plan based on the comments received and applicable agency policies. The final plan will be made available to the public.

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