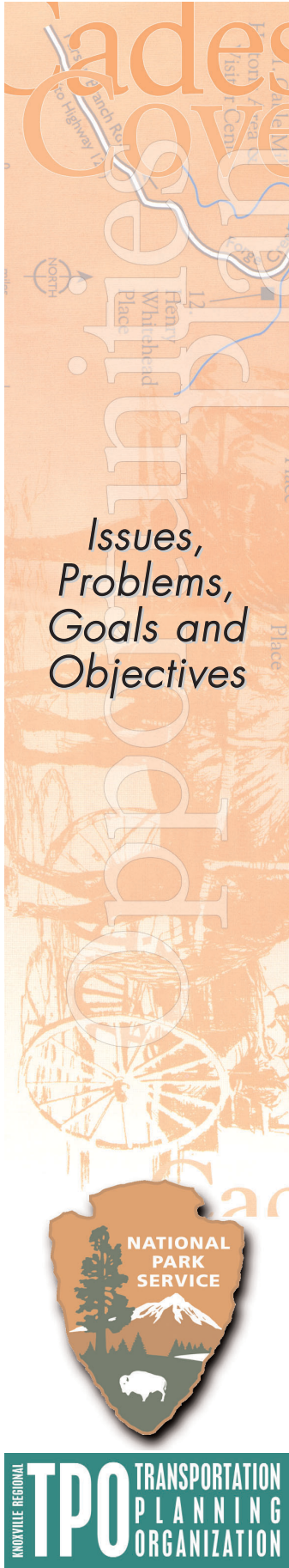


*Issues,
Problems,
Goals and
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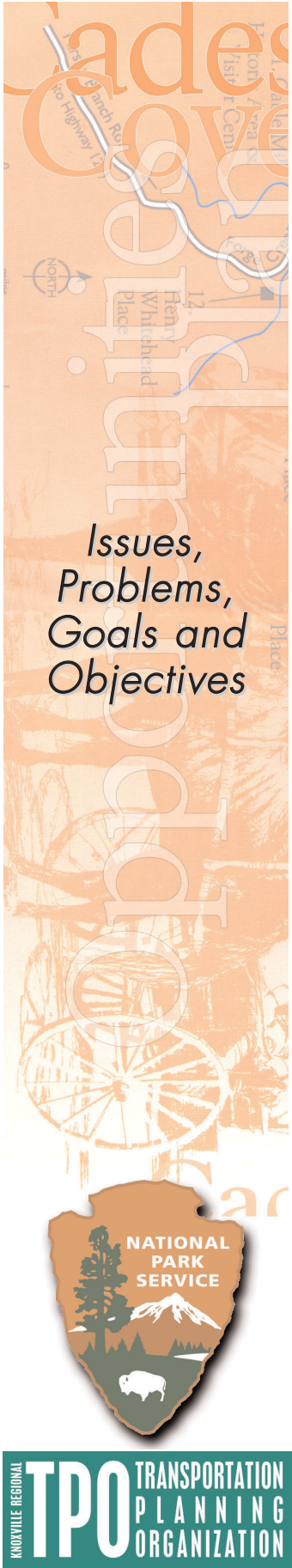
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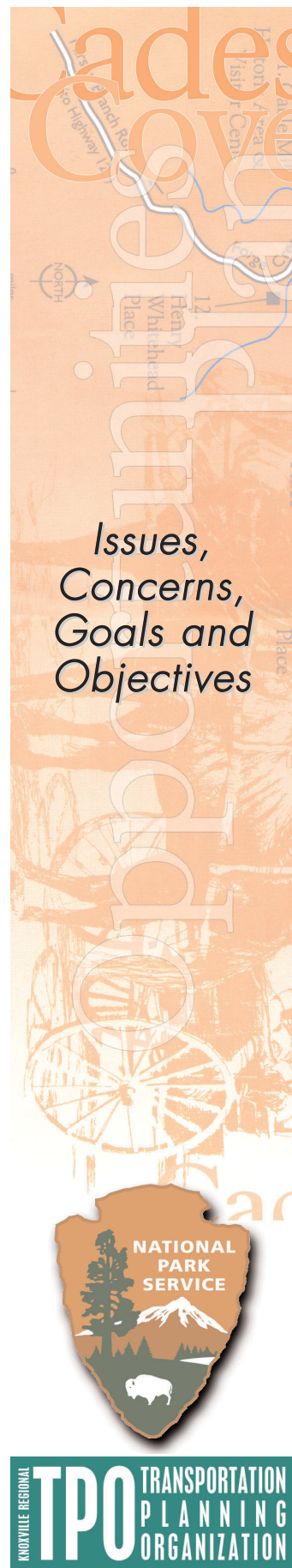
Issues, Problems, Goals and Objectives

| 3 |

Topics Discussed

- Introduction
- Issues and Concerns
- Goals and Objectives





Issues, Problems, Goals and Objectives

From the first days of the process, participants began to voice their concerns and identify issues that could affect the future of the Cove.

To identify as many issues and concerns as possible, and collect input from as wide a range of people as possible, small group discussion sessions were held as part of the public scoping meetings. In addition to the public meetings, internal Park meetings were held to gather information. Written comments were collected via regular mail and the project website. This outreach yielded literally hundreds of issues and concerns.

To make this information useful as alternatives were developed, the project team organized the input into four themes: *visitation, resources, resource education, and facilities and services.*

Armed with this information, the project team identified a set of problem areas, then compiled information and field data (summarized in Chapter 1) to inform the discussion of these problems. Later



Traffic congestion was a major subject of public comments

in the process, potential solutions were developed to address these problems. The concepts, as well as the process of developing alternatives, are discussed in Chapter 4.

This chapter provides a sample of the most prevalent issues and concerns and discusses the problem areas in some depth.

Issues and Concerns Identified by the Public

Almost two-thirds of the comments received during the planning process related to traffic congestion, overcrowding or air quality. Other concerns included the need to educate the public about the Cove in advance of their visit and the need to better manage resources (in part through stronger law enforcement). Many people also voiced the concern that the traditional visitor experience would be lost if the NPS changed anything in the Cove.

A comment form was distributed at the public scoping meeting in May 2002 to gather the input of people who resided near the Park. Many of these comments focused on Park access, particularly the comments made by descendants of former Cove residents. Others were concerned about the lack of preservation for historic structures, the loss of wildlife viewing opportunities caused by fields not being maintained and cattle being removed, and a belief that the NPS already had decided to implement a transit system and prohibit private vehicles on the Loop Road.

In response to the concern that the outcome of the planning process had already been determined, the project team made an effort following the May 2002 meeting to inform the public that the process sought, first and foremost, to identify potential actions and policies that would protect resources and maintain a high quality visitor experience. To this end, a range of alternatives were to be developed in later steps that incorporated these ideas from the public.

A sampling of comments, organized by planning theme, are included below to illustrate the types and content of comments received. Comments relating

to more than one theme are included under each topic to which they apply.

Visitation

Many issues related to how visitors experience the Cove. Problems such as overcrowding and maintenance were grouped under this theme.

- “Too many visitors, but you must keep it no charge.”
- “Overcrowding especially in the loop area. Financial upkeep of the Cove.”
- “I would say that the major issue would be overcrowding but I’ve grown to accept that.”
- “We have no problem with the time it takes to see the Cove...it is really sad that a few people are going to try to change the quaintness and beauty that we have now.”
- “Excessive traffic and ignorant, thoughtless, rude drivers who refuse to use the provided pull-offs to stop and look at the scenery.”
- “Restoration to pioneer period: fields mowed, more pull-offs, charge a fee for day visitors enough to limit visitors to those who appreciate history-wildlife and will respect the Cove.”
- “Too many people and cars.”
- “Provide a good experience for visitors.”
- “Accommodate visitors, preservation of Cove, protect wildlife viewing, keep people from approaching wildlife.”

Resources

Resource issue and concerns included vandalism to historic structures, pollution and protecting flora and fauna.

- “Accommodate visitors, preservation of Cove, protect wildlife viewing, keep people from approaching wildlife.”
- “Restoration to pioneer period - fields mowed more pull-offs - charge a fee for day visitors enough to limit visitors to those who appreciate history and wildlife and will respect the Cove.”

- “Keep natural, i.e., as it was when 1st opened as a tourist attraction; keep original goal as main focus; get rid of emissions pollution.”
- “Preservation of the natural resources with continued public access at this point will necessitate some change in vehicle access.”
- “Preservation of history, resources, environment while managing traffic and its detrimental effects, keeping visitors happy.”
- “Preservation/restoration of Cove history, buildings & accommodating the volume of visitors. Wildlife viewing opportunities must be protected.”
- “The amount of traffic going through the loop create wear and tear on natural beauty of area.”
- “The amount of exhaust produced by the parking lot of idling cars on the loop during peak viewing is noxious and destructive. If it was hard for me to breathe, I can only imagine what it must do to the trees.”
- “There is a need for archeological analysis.”

Resource Education

This theme included all manner of needs related to the need to educate visitors about the Cove’s natural and cultural resources as well as Park rules.

- “Extremely limited interpretation of cultural and historical features.”
- “Keeping the history alive; to make sure that every visitor to the Cove has the opportunity to learn what the Cove is, what it was, and what it will be.”
- “. . . provide a good experience for visitors, interpret the resource.”
- “Education - traffic - visitor use.”
- “People management, education, transportation. Natural and cultural resource protection: wildlife and special natural areas. Bring the cabins, barns, and churches back to life with educational programs, fun, interesting.....”
- “Teaching the people how to use the park properly.”

Facilities and Services

Another common set of concerns related to infrastructure and all manner of visitor facilities, including emergency access and policing.

- “The transportation system & management is overwhelmed. The number of visitors keeps increasing while no alternatives of care are presented at this point. A solution needs to be obtained.
- “Need for continued maintenance of roads and structures. People stop in the middle of the road; thus blocking traffic.”
- “Lack of restroom capacity”
- “I believe that more personnel posted throughout the Cove...would take care of the problem”
- “Need separate bike trail that more people could enjoy. Unsafe with both cars and bikes on the same road and its too narrow.”
- “Emergency access to accidents and injuries is slowed and sometimes blocked by traffic congestion”
- “The lack of a sufficient transportation plan, insufficient transportation leads to decreased response times for emergencies. Insufficient infrastructure.”

Identifying Problems

From these comments on issues and concerns, the project team developed a set of problem statements. The following sections describe these problems and detail their extent. The concepts developed to address these problems are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. These problems are summarized below.

Traffic Congestion

Vehicle traffic in the Cove has generally increased over time. Approximately 454,000 vehicles entered the Cove in 1986, compared to 698,061 in 2000, a 54 percent increase. The 2000 figure actually represents a slight reduction from the 1999 peak of 713,000 vehicles, but the number of vehicles traveling through the Cove remains significant nonetheless.

Visitation between 1999 and 2002 ranged between 1.5 to nearly 2 million people per year. Although these visitation figures are below the most recent peak year in 2001 when over 2.1 million visitors experienced the Cove, they still represent a high level of visitation.

In 1998, Operations Research Consulting Associates conducted a survey during the summer and fall peak periods to collect visitor and traffic count data and survey visitors directly.

Based on this survey, the average time it took a motorist to travel the length of the Loop Road was estimated at 3.0 hours during the summer peak and 3.1 hours in the fall peak. Accounting for vehicle stops, this estimate equates to an average travel speed of 5 miles per hour (mph), while the posted speed limit is 20 mph.

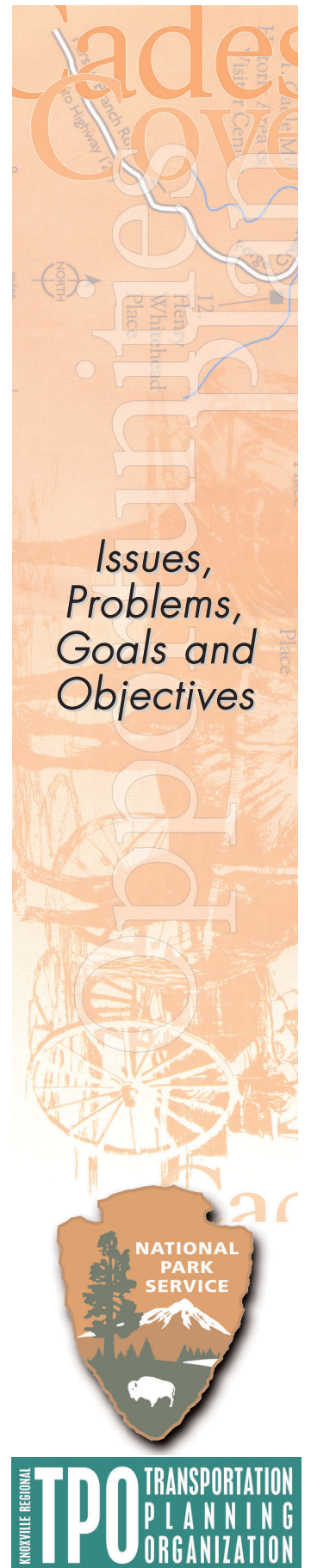
As part of the 1998 study, the number of vehicles involved in each identified traffic backup was counted. The study found that the number of vehicles involved in traffic back-ups at any one time increased dramatically when more than 800 vehicles were using the Loop Road. During these congested periods, 300 to 330 vehicles were entering the Cove via the Loop Road each hour.

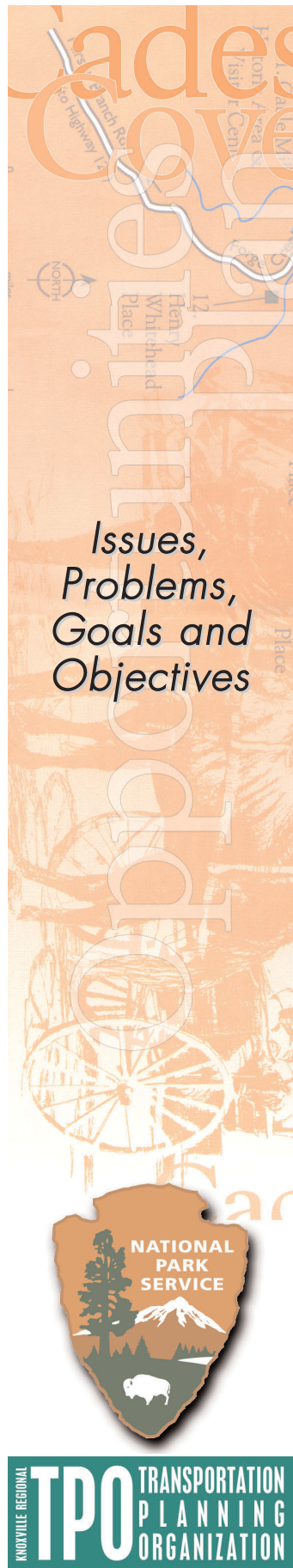
Calculating the ratio of total vehicles to entering vehicles per hour suggests that the typical trip along the length of the Loop Road, without delays, is about 2.5 hours.

To prevent queues from forming throughout the day, the daily volume would have to be maintained at approximately 3,000 to 3,500 vehicles, or 330 vehicles entering per hour. Therefore, the 4,100 to 4,450 vehicles per day entering the Cove during the peak season clearly exceed the physical capacity of the Loop Road.

Motorized and Non-Motorized User Conflicts

The Loop Road is too narrow to safely accommodate the multiple modes of transportation (pedestrians, bicycles, cars, motor homes and buses) that use it. When the road is closed to motorized vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists can experience the Cove





in a car-free environment. The rest of the time, pedestrians and bicyclists must share the Loop Road with private vehicles, which also results in traffic congestion when vehicles must slow down to pass bicyclists and pedestrians.

Inadequate Visitor Orientation

Many first-time visitors do not understand the route options available to them as they travel around the Cove, and many are not aware of Park rules that apply to the Loop Road. Unfortunately, the orientation shelter at the entrance to the Cove is often unstaffed, has limited information available when it is staffed, and is easily missed by visitors. If visitors do not take note of the orientation shelter, the next location at which they can receive information is in the Cable Mill area, halfway around the Loop Road.

Parking Problems

Although most paved parking lots operate with excess capacity during peak periods, a 1998 survey found that demand exceeds the supply of spaces at several parking lots, including the ones at Abrams Falls and Elijah Oliver Place, the campstore parking area and at John Oliver Place. When spaces are not available in these lots, motorists sometimes park alongside the road or in areas not designated for parking. This overflow contributes to traffic congestion by inhibiting traffic flow.

Also, the entrance parking lot is often full when motorized vehicles are prohibited from the Loop Road. The road is closed to motorized traffic between May and September on Wednesday and Saturday mornings from sunrise to 10 a.m. Visitors arriving to bicycle or walk along the Loop Road park at the entrance parking lot, the campstore parking lot, and the horse concession parking area. The popularity of these activities creates a demand for parking that exceeds the number of available spaces.

Resource Issues

The increase in visitation and vehicles in the Cove have contributed to natural and cultural resource

damage. As noted earlier, visitors pull off the Loop Road to park in unpaved areas, thereby creating informal pull-offs that damage the roadside vegetation and create erosion problems. Also, some motorists drive and park in the fields.

Visitors to the Cove have created informal paths or social trails through many of the historic sites and into the fields and forests of the Cove. These unplanned trails can impact not only sensitive vegetation but also historic resources and contribute to erosion problems.

Damage to historic structures is another consequence of heavy visitor use. Natural wear-and-tear, coupled with visitor use, has contributed to the deterioration of these structures. Graffiti and vandalism also is a continuing problem.

As visitation has increased, the interaction of humans and wildlife also has grown, and this has led to another set of problems. Visitors sometimes feed or harass wildlife. Animals that become accustomed to eating human food become food conditioned (panhandlers) and are generally less healthy than animals that are not food conditioned. Also, animals that lose their natural instinct to avoid people can pose a safety hazard to visitors and themselves.

The scenic vistas, pastoral setting and ability to view wildlife attract visitors to the Cove. Maintaining the valley floor as open, with woodlots and fencerows, and allowing optimal viewing of wildlife is important to the visitor experience. Unfortunately, no official day-to-day management plan guides the management of the Cove's open fields and natural and cultural resources today.

Resource Education Issues

An array of interpretive services that inform visitors about the Cove's resources is lacking. Interpretive services are limited by the size and location of existing visitor facilities and current staffing levels.

Facilities and Services Issues

The response time to incidents (vehicle accidents, fires, etc.) in the Cove is affected by roadway congestion, levels of Park staff and the volume of emergency calls. Approximately 45 percent of injury/illness incidents in the Park that require ranger response occur in the Cove, while approximately 75 percent of liquor law violations in the Park occur in the Cove. Of the motor vehicle accidents that occur in the Park, approximately 15 percent have occurred in the Cove, most of which have involved only minor property damage.

Traffic congestion on the Loop Road not only increases incident response time but also inhibits emergency vehicle access. It can be difficult for emergency vehicles to pass other vehicles on the Loop Road and alternate access is not available.

The Loop Road needs resurfacing and, as noted above, lacks the physical capacity to meet current demand. Also, maintenance work is often restricted by heavy traffic.

One common issue affecting the visitor experience is the insufficient number of restrooms. Restrooms are available at the campground, the campstore, the picnic grounds and the horse concession area, but these locations are problematic. Restrooms are not available at the entrance to the Loop Road, and the only restrooms along the road itself are at the Cable Mill area (where 13 urinal and stalls are available for men and eight restroom stalls are available for women, an inadequate number during peak periods).

Other facility needs or issues include inadequate space at the campstore and picnic facilities that are very crowded during peak periods. Although parking spaces, picnic sites and campsites have been designated as ADA accessible, these do not always meet current accessibility standards. Also, there are no ADA-accessible trails in the Cove and most attractions are not accessible.

The utility infrastructure is generally inadequate to serve visitor and NPS needs. Water, electric and telephone facilities are lacking in the Cable Mill area

and other areas. No emergency communication or cellular phone coverage is available for visitor use. Sewage treatment facilities at all locations are at capacity and will not be adequate to accommodate increased visitor demand.

Goals And Objectives

To help the project team determine which of the many issues and concerns could be addressed through the planning process, goals and objectives were developed. **Goals are broad statements that describe future desired conditions. Objectives are action statements related to each goal that help to shape the development of policy and implementation of policies.**

In this project, goals and objectives were developed in three steps:

First, a draft set of goals and objectives was developed, reflecting the major planning topics from the issues and concerns phase of the project. These goals were rooted in the mission of the NPS and were related to existing Park goals.

Second, a discussion of these draft goals and objectives was held with the Park management team. This helped to refine the goals and ensured that input from every division within the Park was included.

Third, internal and public meetings were held. In this step, the draft goals and objectives were refined based on the comments. The management team reviewed the final goals and objectives to ensure they would achieve the intent of the enabling legislation as well as the Park’s goals.

Resource Goal: Enhance the protection and preservation of the natural and cultural resources of Cades Cove.

Objectives:

- Ensure a coordinated strategy for resource management decisions by developing and implementing a Cultural Landscape Resource

- Management Plan that includes a Field Management Plan.
- Promote access strategies that are sustainable and long term.
 - Support stewardship of resources through enhanced education, enforcement and scientific inquiry.
 - Implement initiatives and technologies to improve air quality.
 - Consider strategies to avoid noise and light pollution.
 - Consider strategies for stream bank management.

Visitation Goal: Provide exceptional visitor experiences that respect the natural and cultural resources of Cades Cove.

Objectives:

- Define appropriate visitor activities and recreational opportunities.
- Provide quality visitor facilities and services.
- Evaluate commercial visitor services to determine the appropriate level and type of services to meet visitor need.
- Develop resource education opportunities to provide information, orientation and education.
- Provide information to the public prior to arrival, including: Transportation options and information (estimated travel times); rules and regulations; safety; leave no trace; wildlife; maintenance activities (road and facility closures); and air quality information.
- Provide transportation choices that accommodate appropriate visitor activities while ensuring resource protection.

Resource Education Goal: Educate the public about resources in order to foster greater enjoyment, understanding, appreciation and protection of natural and cultural resources within Cades Cove.

Objectives:

- Ensure that resource education programs reflect the Park’s three major education themes of biodiversity, refuge of scenic beauty and continuum of human activity, through providing a wide variety of educational opportunities, including:
 - Media/publications
 - Wayside exhibits
 - Public programs
 - Person-to-person contact
 - Curriculum-based school programs
 - Create and maintain relationships with civic and community groups.

Facilities and Services Goal: Provide appropriate facilities and services that are safe, environmentally sensitive, accessible and sustainable in Cades Cove.

Objectives:

- Provide quality facilities and infrastructure
- Provide appropriately located facilities/infrastructure that:
 - Meets visitor and operational needs
 - Respects the natural and cultural resources
 - Provides personnel and financial resources to secure/support quality services
 - Considers public/private partnerships for visitor services

