

Frequently Asked Questions: National Recreation Areas

1. What is a national recreation area?

A National Recreation Area is a flexible designation of an area to highlight, sustain, and promote nationally significant land and water recreation areas that may also include historic structures, trails, and other sites. The area can be managed by a local partnership that can include local, state, and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private landowners. It is a vehicle for coordinating visitor services, coastal flood control and resource protection, and land management among voluntarily participating partners.

2. How would a Texas coastal national recreation area benefit the region?

Creating a new national recreation area within a coastal buffer zone is one strategy for capitalizing on the economic value of the area's natural, cultural, and historical sites while ensuring long-term flood protection. Coastal natural areas store water during storm events, reducing flooding and property damage to inland communities. Designation of a coastal national recreation area would put this Texas region on a par with the nation's most-outstanding nationally significant recreation areas, bringing exposure to large national and international visitor markets.

3. How would a national recreation area be funded?

National recreation areas are eligible for funding from the National Park Service but also can receive state, local, nonprofit, and private support. Park funding can help support ongoing operations, maintenance, and marketing/promotion such as signs, maps and national website exposure. Funding can support technical, educational, and other staff as well as funding to improve visitor access. Partner sites would continue to fund their own operations but might enjoy some savings in shared efforts such as marketing, security, etc.

Achieving national recreation area status typically expands private fundraising opportunities by enhancing the region's ability to compete for funding from non-local sources. Congress may also authorize financial or technical assistance for nationally significant areas that are affiliated with the National Park System but remain under private, state, or local jurisdiction subject. State and local governments may apply for grants through the National Park Service to support historic preservation and acquisition or development of recreational facilities when funds are available.

An array of additional local funding opportunities could also be explored and have been used at other national recreation areas.

4. How are private landowners affected by a national recreation area designation?

Only those landowners who choose to participate would be directly affected by designation. There would be no additional regulations governing non-participating private landowners. No land is condemned. If land is acquired (by local, state, or federal governments), it is from willing sellers.

Landowners who choose to participate would be governed by their own, jointly-developed management agreements that would address issues common to the national recreation area. These agreements specify the formal governing and management roles of the National Park Service and the state and local governments, non-profit organizations and private landowners forming the partnership. The agreement would also lay out procedures for periodic updates and revisions.

5. If a private landowner participates, how is liability handled?

Landowners who choose to allow free public access for recreational purposes are protected from liability by the State of Texas Recreational Use Statute.

[*\(Click here for a copy of the statute\)*](#)

6. How is a national recreation area managed and governed? Would the national recreation area supersede agency mandates (e.g., for US Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuges, State Wildlife Management Areas, General Land Office-managed assets and other public lands)?

A national recreation area can be governed using a local, state, and federal public-private partnership. This provides a flexible way to achieve the benefits and stature of National Park Service involvement while sustaining local participation in management. Participating agencies could structure the jointly developed management agreement to align with their established management practices. Legislation authorizing national recreation areas can allow for a wide range of activities identified through local collaborative processes that identify goals and opportunities. Units of the National Park System are managed so as to "leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations".

[*\(Click here for an example of management of the Boston Harbor Islands National Recreation Area uses\)*](#)

7. How do agencies and other partners work together?

Management alternatives are broad and may include continued management by state or local governments, the private sector, or other federal agencies; technical or financial assistance from established programs or special projects; and management by others as a designated or protected area. It is anticipated that a joint governance body would be established under the management agreement developed by the participating entities and as part of the designation process. This group would meet on a regular basis to address joint goals and issues as defined by the management agreement.

8. What is the Park Service role in a national recreation area?

The Park Service role varies significantly across the different national recreation areas. For national recreation areas that are structured as partnerships, the Park Service can play a coordinating role and contribute expertise in areas such as education, interpretation, science, visitor services, recreation management, and planning. The Park Service may, but is not required, to own some land within the national recreation area. Any Park Service lands would be established solely through voluntary transactions with nonprofit landowning organizations or others interested in transferring lands to the Park Service.

9. Who provides for dedicated staff for the NRA?

The National Park Service would provide some staffing, in addition to the staff provided by the participating public and private landowners.

10. Is a national recreation area simply a name, or are there tangible management and other benefits?

The 270 million visitors annually to the national parks make a significant contribution to the economy of the nation and, especially, to gateway communities adjacent to these areas. The principal economic beneficiaries of this enormous visitation include vendors in the food, lodging, outdoor recreation, and travel businesses. Other local and national firms benefit by providing services or supplies required for operating, maintaining and sustaining parks and other outdoor recreation areas. The Park Service may, but is not required, to own some land within the national recreation area.

Programming, facilities construction and maintenance, signage, and resource protection can all benefit from the coordinated efforts of a national recreation area.