

# Shenandoah National Park

## Wilderness Education Plan 2002 - 2007

### Program History

To preserve Shenandoah National Park's wilderness resource, the park established a Wilderness Education Program in 1997. A Wilderness Education Plan was written in support of the revised Backcountry and Wilderness Management Plan. The program has been successfully implemented and has received national recognition for its accomplishments.

1997

- Secured Natural Resource Protection Program (NRPP) funding to implement revised Backcountry and Wilderness Management Plan.
- Received NPS Wilderness Management and Stewardship Award.

1998

- Backcountry survey conducted by Virginia Technological University showed that the visitors to Shenandoah's backcountry and wilderness area support wilderness yet do not differentiate between the concept of wilderness and designated wilderness. Survey report recommended that Shenandoah managers consider increasing wilderness education efforts.

1999

- Hired term position to implement education component of Backcountry and Wilderness Management Plan through NRPP funding.
- Integrated wilderness into regularly scheduled interpretive programs.

2000

- Visitor Study conducted by University of Idaho shows that 71% of visitors rate "experiencing wilderness" as a very important reason for visiting Shenandoah National Park. 92% of visitors rated wilderness as very important in "planning for the preservation of the park for future generations."

2001

- Integrated wilderness education into Shenandoah's Comprehensive Interpretive Plan.
- Conducted first Wilderness Weekend commemorating Shenandoah National Park's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of designated wilderness.

### National Park Service Policy Directives for Wilderness Education

Shenandoah National Park's Wilderness Education Program is consistent with National Park Service policy and initiatives.

NPS 2001 Management Policies 6.4.2 Wilderness Interpretation and Education

"In the context of interpretive and educational planning, national park units with wilderness resources will: (1) operate public education programs designed to promote and perpetuate public awareness of, and appreciation for, wilderness character, resources, and ethics, while providing for acceptable use limits; (2) focus on fostering an understanding of the concept of wilderness that includes respect for the resource, willingness to exercise self-restraint in demanding access to it, and an ability to adhere to appropriate, minimum-impact techniques; and (3) encourage the public to use and accept wilderness on its own terms; i.e., the acceptance of an undeveloped, primitive environment and the assumption of the potential risks and responsibilities involved in using and enjoying wilderness areas. National Park Service interpretive plans and programs for wilderness parks will address the primary interpretive themes for wilderness. Education is among the most effective tools for dealing with wilderness-use management problems and should generally be applied before more restrictive management tools."

Directors Order #41 Sec. C6

"The Comprehensive Interpretive Plan for parks with wilderness will include and address the primary park interpretive themes that reflect the wilderness significance statements that appear in the park's GPRA Plan. Wilderness character and resources should be included in the park's interpretation and educational program, and be included as an integral component of the long range interpretive plan and annual implementation plan. . .

Public interpretation and education is essential for the support, understanding, and protection of wilderness. On-site programs may include talks, walks and other presentations, trailhead information, publications, and wilderness information centers or exhibits in existing visitor centers. Off-site and outreach programs may include a variety of presentations, curriculum-based education programs, web page sites, and publications. . .

Staff education is an integral part of any wilderness education program. Wilderness awareness training will be incorporated into all appropriate training programs. Examples include orientation training for seasonal park staff, cooperating associations, concessions, and volunteers. Park managers are encouraged to establish partnerships to better promote the benefits and values of wilderness."

NPS Wilderness Education and Partnership Plan, 2002, National Wilderness Steering Committee

"The goal of the NPS Wilderness Education and Partnership Plan is to broaden awareness, knowledge, appreciation and support of wilderness in an increasingly diverse population. . . . Desired results include increased public support for wilderness that results

in protection of wilderness resources and preservation of wilderness for future generations.” The plan outlines significance statements, interpretive themes and products which guide development of wilderness education programs.

## **Shenandoah Management Directives**

Shenandoah National Park’s Wilderness Education Program is consistent with Shenandoah National Park’s Strategic Plan 2001 – 2005 and with Shenandoah National Park’s Backcountry and Wilderness Management Plan.

### Shenandoah Long Term Goals

la0: By September 30, 2005, 90% of changes to natural and cultural resources in wilderness and backcountry areas caused by visitor behavior are within acceptable levels.  
la0.1: Wilderness and backcountry leaders and users demonstrate outdoor skills and ethics through the Wilderness Education Program and its multiple partnerships.

Ilb1: By September 30, 2005, 90% of visitors surveyed understand and appreciate the significance of the park.

Ilb1.1: Shenandoah visitors learn accurate stories, through current scholarship, about the park significance and build connections through personal interpretive programs, interpretive exhibits and AV, and printed media, which incorporate different points of view.

Ilb1.2: Citizens in neighboring communities find opportunities to build long-lasting and meaningful connections to the park by exploring critical issues through special-interest programming and temporary exhibits and become supporters of park mission goals.

### Shenandoah Backcountry and Wilderness Management Plan Chapter 11

“Most experts believe that the majority of unacceptable visitor impacts in backcountry or wilderness settings are nonmalicious acts. ... Persuasive and well directed information can be highly effective in reducing environmental impacts, visitor conflicts, and problem behaviors.”

## **Shenandoah Wilderness Education Program Goals**

Education and interpretation are effective management tools to prevent resource damage and to preserve wilderness resources in perpetuity. The following goals define the Wilderness Education Program's vision through 2007.

1. By 2007, park visitors and neighbors exhibit a knowledge and appreciation for the history and value of wilderness as a unique resource and are active stewards in conserving wilderness areas.
2. By 2007, park staff, concession staff, partners and managers communicate accurate wilderness messages to the public.
3. By 2007, wilderness user groups, including local summer camps and university outdoor groups, demonstrate and promote appropriate wilderness ethics and minimum impact guidelines as outlined by the Leave No Trace program.
4. By 2007, land management agencies and non-government organizations are full partners in expanding and implementing wilderness education locally and nationally.

## **Strategies**

Strategies provide measurable actions which achieve the goals of Shenandoah's Wilderness Education Program.

Goal 1 - By 2007, park neighbors and visitors exhibit a knowledge and appreciation for the history and value of wilderness as a unique resource and are active stewards in conserving natural environments.

- Plan and implement an annual Wilderness Weekend.
- Plan, coordinate, and implement 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of Shenandoah's designated wilderness in 2006.
- Determine appropriate standards of learning for the development and implementation of a curriculum based wilderness education program for schools.
- Integrate wilderness ethics and appropriate minimum impact messages consistent with Leave No Trace principles into "Parks As Classroom" pre and post visit activities and teacher information packets.
- Plan and implement overnight expeditions into Shenandoah wilderness area for local high school students.
- Plan and conduct outreach programs to non-traditional wilderness visitors.
- Conduct seminars focused on wilderness issues as part of Shenandoah's Field Seminar series.

- Publish articles annually in *Shenandoah Overlook* on wilderness topics, issues and values.
- Integrate wilderness messages into planning and installation of permanent interpretive exhibit at Dickey Ridge Visitor Center.
- Integrate wilderness messages into planning and installation of permanent interpretive exhibit at Byrd Visitor Center.
- Integrate wilderness messages into planning and installation of permanent interpretive exhibits at Panorama Visitor Center.
- Integrate wilderness messages into planning and installation of temporary interpretive exhibits at Loft Mountain Information Center.
- Integrate wilderness messages into planning and installation of temporary interpretive exhibits at Backcountry Information Center.
- Integrate and update wilderness information on Shenandoah's web page.
- Implement interactive computer touch-screen program project into Dickey Ridge Visitor Center interpretive Exhibit.
- Implement interactive computer touch-screen program project into Byrd Visitor Center interpretive Exhibit.
- Implement interactive computer touch-screen program project into Panorama Visitor Center interpretive Exhibit.
- Install interactive computer wilderness program into Shenandoah's internet services.

Goal 2 - By 2007, park staff, concession staff, partners and managers communicate accurate wilderness messages to the public.

- Conduct annual training for park interpretive staff on Leave No Trace, park backcountry and wilderness management policy, and interpretation of the history and value of wilderness.
- Conduct annual training for seasonal staff in all divisions on wilderness, wilderness ethics and Leave No Trace principles.
- Conduct at least one Leave No Trace Train The Trainer course for park and concession personnel annually.
- Update Wilderness Resource Notebook for field employees annually.
- Integrate wilderness themes into park interpretive services including media development, interpretive programming, interpretive displays, exhibits, publications, and bulletin boards.
- Assist in revising Shenandoah's Backcountry and Wilderness Management Plan to ensure wilderness education component.
- Write articles for internal interagency publications such as *People, Land, Water*, the *Arrowhead* and NPS website *InsideNPS*.
- Seek and obtain outside funding for projects and actions.
- Establish interdivisional Shenandoah wilderness education advisory group to maintain communication, cooperation, and support for wilderness education projects.

- Prepare annual Wilderness Education Plan based on five year plan and share with park staff.
- Produce annual reports of Wilderness Education Program for management team and Shenandoah National Park workgroups.

Goal 3 - By 2007, wilderness user groups, including local summer camps and university outdoor groups, demonstrate and promote appropriate wilderness ethics and minimum impact guidelines as outlined by the Leave No Trace program.

- Establish formal partnerships and working relationships with local college and university outdoor recreation programs. Coordinate trainings, education programs, and college classes for staff members and students.
- Coordinate an outdoor recreation workshop for regional college and university program leaders.
- Establish working partnerships with local summer camps to integrate wilderness ethics and Leave No Trace principles into their operations.
- Establish formal partnerships with local outdoor retailers to institute and promote appropriate wilderness ethics and minimum impact principles into their operations.
- Assist with revision of Shenandoah's Backcountry Camping brochure to ensure continued wilderness message.
- Work with Natural Resources Division to ensure wilderness education component in Shenandoah's cliff management plan.

Goal 4 - By 2007, federal land management agencies, non-government organizations are full partners in expanding and implementing wilderness education.

- Coordinate local, regional, and national Boy Scout and Girl Scout events to promote wilderness ethics and Leave No Trace principles and techniques.
- Implement components of NPS Wilderness Education and Partnership Plan.
- Advise and inform NPS National Wilderness Steering Committee on regional and national wilderness education and interpretation issues.
- Assist with production of a wilderness NPS unigrid in cooperation with Harpers Ferry Center.
- Assist with production of a wilderness handbook in coordination with Harpers Ferry Center.
- Assist with revision of Arthur Carhart National Interagency Training Center education curriculum.
- Plan and implement activities celebrating 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of The Wilderness Act, September 3, 2004 in coordination with national initiatives.
- Participate in planning and development of the Wilderness Stewardship Expo and Summit, October 2004.

- Continue planning and implementing wilderness education events and activities with the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club.
- Present Shenandoah and NPS wilderness education programs at professional venues, including The George Wright Society, Arthur Carhart National Interagency Wilderness Training Center, National Association of Interpretation, North American Association of Experiential Education.
- Coordinate development and distribution of wilderness information with the NPS Natural Resources Information Division.
- Assist Potomac Appalachian Trail Club LNT committee with logistical support and equipment for LNT trainer courses.
- Coordinate publication of wilderness information in regional and national publications such as The Potomac Appalachian, LNT Tracker, Backpacker Magazine, and the National Parks Conservation Association magazine.

### **Assessing Success**

Shenandoah National Park's Wilderness Education Program will monitor and evaluate program success. The long term goal of the Wilderness Education Program is to increase the public's awareness, knowledge and understanding of designated wilderness. Therefore:

By 2007, 80% of participants in Wilderness Education Program activities demonstrate awareness, knowledge and understanding of designated wilderness.

Methods used to measure this goal include, but are not limited to:

- Participant evaluations
- Visitor comments
- Direct observation of visitor interaction with wilderness exhibits
- Documentation of articles in local press
- Documentation of resource conditions in Shenandoah's backcountry and wilderness area