



National Park Service

Department of the Interior

Chief FOIA Officer Report to the Attorney General

I. Steps Taken to Apply the Presumption of Openness

1. Both the President's Memorandum and the Attorney General's FOIA Guidelines were distributed to regional FOIA Officers and all employees through regional directorate chains of command.

Training is also a key component of our plan to enhance openness:

- a. The Memorandum and Guidelines are also being incorporated in mandatory annual DOI FOIA training.
- b. Training was provided to FOIA staff in the Northeast, National Capital and Pacific West regions, as well as to staff in the Denver Service Center's contracting services division.
- c. Intermountain Region public affairs staff are scheduled for FOIA training in March 2010.
- d. Denver Service Center/Acting NPS FOIA Officer attended the USDA Graduate School's FOIA course.
- e. Three NPS FOIA staff attended the national training conference sponsored by the American Society of Access Professionals.

As a result of the Administration's policy, we no longer classify requests for copies of publications such as General Management Plans or Environmental Impact Statements as FOIA requests. Rather, when we receive such requests, we simply mail requesters copies as a matter of routine use releases or refer them to copies posted on the Web. The NPS neither maintains statistics on discretionary disclosures, nor does it have any examples of discretionary releases that have been made since issuance of the new FOIA guidelines.

2. The NPS had a 15 percent increase in full grants between FY08 and FY09 (from 485 to 559). In FY08, the NPS had 213 partial grants. In FY09, the NPS had 163 partial grants (a 23 percent decrease from FY08 to FY09). Overall, the NPS experienced a 3.4 percent increase in FY09 in both full and partial grants over FY08 (from 698 to 722).



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II. Steps Taken to Ensure an Effective System for Responding to Requests

The NPS provides an online form that people can complete to submit requests and has set up a generic FOIA mailbox to receive requests. The generic e-mail box automatically notifies the NPS FOIA Officer when a new request is received in lieu of relying on staff to manually check for new requests. There are currently no issues with IT support due to the placement of FOIA responsibilities within the CIO's directorate. Lotus Notes calendar and reminder functions are also utilized to track due dates and send automatic reminders. The NPS also has nine regional FOIA officers who both process requests for information from the regional offices and serve in an advisory capacity to park units within their regions.

III. Steps Taken to Increase Proactive Disclosures

NPS staff have taken multiple steps to obviate the need to process requests for commonly requested records through the FOIA process. The NPS FOIA Officer now has the ability to maintain the NPS FOIA website, including posting documents in the reading rooms and on the frequently requested documents page, instead of having to submit documents for posting to the Web support group. Each park website also has a page titled "Management Docs" that can be used to post copies of frequently requested documents.

The NPS was also voluntarily and proactively posting documents to several of its websites ahead of the Administration's issuance of the new FOIA guidelines. For example, the NPS provides copies of final planning documents and scientific reports and other materials through the Technical Information Center (TIC). The TIC (accessible online at http://www.nps.gov/dsc/a_who/a_8_TIC%20info.htm) also offers the option of submitting requests to an e-mail address that is regularly monitored by TIC staff. The TIC is currently developing an interface that will allow users to browse and search the public portions of the TIC collection online, as well as preview and download scanned copies of items from the collection.

Documents created during the public comment phase of many projects are also available via the Web at the Planning, Environment and Public Comment Site (PEPC) site. Copies of historical documents are also regularly uploaded onto the NPS History website. The NPS is also able to use a File Transfer Protocol site to distribute responsive electronic documents during the interagency processing of the request to the requester.



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NPS WEBSITES THAT PROACTIVELY PUBLISH REPORTS	
The Technical Information Center serves as the central repository for NPS planning, design, and construction drawings and related documents	http://www.nps.gov/dsc/a_who/a_8_TIC%20info.htm
The Planning, Environment and Public Comment Site provides access to current plans, environmental impact analyses, and related documents on public review	http://parkplanning.nps.gov/
NPS History	http://www.nps.gov/history/hisnps

IV. Steps Taken to Greater Utilize Technology

1. Yes, the NPS currently receives requests electronically.
2. Not Applicable
3. Yes, the NPS tracks requests electronically in the DOI electronic FOIA tracking system (EFTS).
4. Not Applicable
5. Yes, the NPS uses technology to process requests, including redaction software—but with some limitations.
6. Some NPS offices have the technology and software necessary to process redactions in an electronic manner; many do not. Thus, there isn't a standardized methodology or system available to people.
7. Yes, the NPS utilizes technology to prepare its FOIA Annual Report (the DOI EFTS).
8. Not Applicable



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V. Steps Taken to Reduce Backlogs and Improve Timeliness in Responding to Requests

1. The NPS FOIA backlog increased from 30 at the end of FY08 to 45 at the end of FY09. At the end of FY08, our oldest request was dated 8/25/2006. At the end of FY09, our oldest request was dated 11/22/2006.

2. Personnel and organizational issues played a role in its backlog increase. The NPS's FOIA Officer left in the middle of September, thus there was not time for the Acting FOIA Officer to work and review/reduce the backlog before the end of the fiscal year. Most regional FOIA Officers handle FOIA as a collateral duty in addition to their full-time jobs as Public Affairs Officers. While some of them have staff to assist them, these regional FOIA Officers are not typically assigned to FOIA full-time. The Southeast Region, which was responsible for over 40 percent of the NPS backlog at the end of FY09, not only had a high turnover of personnel assigned through the year as assistants to the regional FOIA Officer, but also had long periods during which there was no assistance at all. Currently, only regional FOIA Officers have access to EFTS, so park staff must route all information about completed requests through them—thereby resulting in delays in updating the EFTS.

In addition to contacting requesters for each of the ten oldest requests to determine whether the request is even still valid (there is a high likelihood that responses were issued but that the EFTS was not properly updated), we are also taking the steps outlined in Section 3 below.

3. The NPS is taking multiple steps to improve timeliness in responding to requests and administrative appeals:

- a. The Acting NPS FOIA Officer has recommended that each region assign at least one person whose primary job is FOIA, with records management as a collateral duty; under the current system most of the regional FOIA Officers have public affairs as a primary duty and do FOIA along with records management, etc., on a collateral duty basis.
- b. EFTS access will be established for staff at parks with a high volume of requests so that they may input, track and update requests and responses in a timelier manner.
- c. The NPS will also be looking to improve the way in which it provides copies of records, such as motor vehicle accident (MVA) reports, to certain groups of



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requesters who qualify for routine use releases in accordance with Privacy Act System of Records Notices—thereby reducing the number of requests which need to be processed and tracked in the FOIA system.