

## **Sustainability and Disposable Plastic Bottles in Parks** **As of March 21, 2014**

### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

*These FAQs provide some background information on the issue of plastic bottles in parks.*

#### **Does the National Park Service have a national policy on disposable plastic bottles in parks?**

The NPS is a conservation organization and each park is committed to sustainability in its operations. The NPS has implemented a disposable plastic bottle recycling and reduction policy, Policy Memorandum 11-03, with an option to eliminate sales on a park-by-park basis following an extensive review and with the prior approval of the applicable regional director.

Each superintendent is responsible for determining if it is in the best interest of the park to stop the sale of beverages in disposable plastic bottles. If it is, the superintendent must complete a rigorous impact analysis to determine the pros and cons of such a decision. The superintendent must submit this analysis in writing to the regional director, who will make a decision based on this analysis.

#### **Does the NPS support Corporate Accountability International's Think Outside the Bottle Campaign?**

As Federal employees, we are prohibited from endorsing advocacy campaigns by outside groups. However, through the work we do in our programs and national parks, we support our century-old conservation mission in the most environmentally sustainable way possible.

The NPS supports sustainable management of park resources. This includes reducing waste - including recyclables - in parks. For this reason, the NPS policy sets forth a process for superintendents to review the advantages of eliminating the sale of disposable plastic bottles in parks.

#### **What would the economic and environmental impact be of eliminating disposable plastic bottles in parks?**

The NPS policy outlines a process through which superintendents may eliminate the sale of disposable plastic bottles in parks. Such action would not prevent visitors from carrying disposable plastic bottles into the park. For some parks, a majority of disposable plastic bottles are brought into the park by visitors from external retail outlets, while for other parks a majority of disposable plastic bottles are sold within the park.

Additionally, each park manages the sale of food and beverages within the park differently, with arrangements ranging from sales outlets operated by concessioners, friends groups, lease holders, cooperating associations and partners, to direct sales by the parks. The impact would vary from park to park. This is why superintendents are responsible for rigorously evaluating the impact of eliminating the sale of disposable plastic bottles in each park.

## **Talking Points**

*Guidance for answering questions from the media or the public on the issue of disposable plastic bottles in parks.*

### **The National Park Service is the Nation's leading conservation agency.**

- Conservation is at the very heart of the legislation that created the National Park Service in 1916: “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and wild life therein.”
- The National Park Service has adopted a comprehensive Green Parks Plan (GPP), which addresses water and energy use, green house gas emissions, reduction of waste streams, construction practices, as well as other issues, and sets goals that we will reach by 2016.
  - One of the primary goals of the GPP is to increase waste diversion and recycling in our parks
- The National Park Service is committed to sustainability in its operations and to reducing impacts on the environment to the maximum extent possible.

### **To balance the various needs of our visitors and our conservation policies, the National Park Service has implemented a disposable plastic bottle recycling and reduction policy (Policy Memorandum 11-03), with an option to eliminate sales on a park-by-park basis**

- **Recycling:** Parks are strongly encouraged to have a robust recycling program.
- **Reduction:** Parks are strongly encouraged to reduce the sale of beverages in disposable plastic bottles through visitor education on the environmental impact of purchasing decisions and the availability of reasonably priced reusable bottles which can be filled at water fountains or bottle refill stations.
- **Elimination:** Where appropriate, superintendents may request approval from their regional director to eliminate the sale of beverages in disposable plastic bottles by analyzing and addressing a variety of factors, including potential waste eliminated, infrastructure and operation cost incurred, safety considerations, cost and availability of BPA-free reusable containers, and more.
  - For some parks without access to running water for visitors, filling stations for reusable bottles may be deemed impractical.

- **Education:** Parks will develop a proactive visitor education strategy that addresses visitor expectations and explains the rationale for whatever disposable plastic bottle reduction, recycling, or elimination effort is implemented.
- The plastic bottle recycling and reduction policy allows the NPS and park partners to reduce their environmental footprint, introduce visitors to green approaches and products and the concept of environmentally responsible purchasing, and gives them the opportunity to take that environmental ethic home and apply it in their daily lives. It will also be a significant step in reducing our carbon footprint and meeting *A Call to Action* Goal #23, Go Green.

**The National Park Service will continue to find ways to reduce the amount of waste generated in parks, not only from disposable plastic bottles but other sources as well**

- Disposable plastic bottles are one source of the overall waste stream that the park is responsible for removing or recycling.
- The park is engaged in - and will continue to pursue – a variety of sustainable management practices, from energy conservation to recycling to water conservation.
- The National Park Service is committed to being a worldwide leader in demonstrating sustainable practices. Reducing, reusing and recycling are all parts of this effort.

**Talking points for the park’s position:**

If the park has made a decision on this topic, share it and the reasons that led to this decision including anticipated positive outcomes.

If the park is considering the issue:

- We currently allow the use of disposable and re-usable water bottles.
- Before the park could eliminate the sale of beverages in disposable plastic bottles, the superintendent will have to conduct an impact analysis to determine if the pros outweigh the cons of such an action. The analysis will evaluate factors such as whether the elimination of the sale of beverages in disposable plastic bottles would result in a significant reduction in the amount of waste the park manages, and if providing running water at filling stations is practical and affordable.

- The superintendent, with the concurrence of the appropriate regional office, will consider eliminating the sale of beverages in disposable plastic bottles in the park.
- Recycling facilities for disposable plastic bottles will continue to be widely available in the park.

**If asked specifically about drinking park supplied tap water:** We are focused on visitor safety and enjoyment of national parks while we work to reduce waste and recycle. Visitor safety includes proper hydration which means drinking water, whether it comes from bottles or the park's water supply system.