



Strategic Plan for the Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) Program

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Mission:

The PEPC program provides the National Park Service with information technology tools for efficient park planning and resource compliance, project tracking, and public engagement to support collaboration and informed decision making.



Vision:

The PEPC program will support the National Park Service in being the leader and innovator among federal agencies in its integration of user-focused information technology tools with efficient park planning and resource compliance, project tracking, and public engagement.

Goals for the PEPC Program:

1. Provide a broad range of efficient and user-focused tools for servicewide park planning and resource compliance activities.
2. Provide project tracking and review tools to maximize time savings and collaboration among NPS staff.
3. Provide tools that promote meaningful and innovative public engagement.
4. Provide public comment analysis tools that emphasize intuition and versatility.
5. Provide education and outreach activities for NPS staff that emphasize collaboration and engaging formats.
6. Provide excellent customer service that is prompt, personalized, and professional.
7. Provide a stable and durable system of tools, including software, integration, and infrastructure, now and into the future.





Executive Summary

This strategic plan sets the course for the Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) program by articulating the program mission, vision, and key goals and priorities for the next five years. This plan was developed through a collaborative effort among the Environmental Quality Division (EQD) PEPC team, the PEPC Advisory Council, and additional National Park Service (NPS) representatives. The plan centers on a user-focused program built on the following principles: innovation, efficiency, collaboration, and excellent customer service.

The strategic plan was developed to help ensure that the PEPC program meets the needs of its contemporary user base and remains a valuable and viable tool for the National Park Service into the future. Over the next five years, the strategic plan will serve as the basis for annual work plans, which will describe the projects and actions needed to implement specific elements of the plan. In addition, the plan will serve as a mechanism for articulating the PEPC program's needs to senior management.





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Developed for: NRSS Environmental Quality Division
Developed by: Denver Service Center-Planning
Assistance provided by: PEPC Advisory Council



Introduction

Background and Need

The NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment application was initially developed to better integrate NPS environmental compliance and project management processes, provide a standardized mechanism to collect and respond to public comments on environmental documents, and serve as a uniform NPS project tracking system. The program is managed by a team within the Natural Resource Stewardship and Science (NRSS) Environmental Quality Division—they are referred to in this plan as the EQD PEPC team. The EQD PEPC team is supported by the PEPC Advisory Council (PAC). The PEPC Advisory Council is composed of 12 representatives from parks, regions, and divisions in the National Park Service. The core purpose of the PEPC Advisory Council is to steer the operation, maintenance, and development of the PEPC application. The PAC and EQD PEPC team collaborate extensively to manage and improve the PEPC application.

Since its launch in 2005, the PEPC application has proven effective in meeting the needs for which it was initially developed, and has since grown to meet a variety of additional needs. For example, the system has been increasingly used to coordinate the National Historic Preservation Act section 106 consultation process, and a variety of changes have been made to the system to better document and complete required reports on cultural resource compliance activities.

The use of the PEPC application for internal and public document review has also expanded beyond documents associated with a required compliance process. Examples include NPS *Management Policies 2006*, Fire Reference Manuals 18 and 58, the NPS Climate Change Action Plan, Director's Order 41: *Wilderness Stewardship*, and many others. Furthermore, the PEPC application is increasingly used as the file repository for documents in decision and administrative records and now provides a service to archive documents to the NPS Technical Information Center (TIC) electronically.

As the application's use has evolved, its functionality has been enhanced and its user base expanded. Organizationally, the PEPC program has recently been resituated within the NRSS Environmental Quality Division. In response to these changes, the EQD PEPC team collaborated with a number of NPS stakeholders to create a strategic plan for the PEPC program.

This strategic plan focuses on the PEPC program, which includes multiple functional areas such as information technology tools, education and outreach, training, and system maintenance. The PEPC application—the web-based system of planning and compliance tools familiar to many NPS users—is one component of the larger program.

The strategic plan was designed to serve three overarching objectives:

1. to articulate what the program is and what it does
2. to provide a roadmap for program work
3. to challenge existing assumptions about what the program can be, and think imaginatively about positive change

Overall, the strategic planning effort was intended to help the PEPC program meet the needs of its contemporary user base and remain a valuable tool for the National Park Service into the future.

During development of the plan, four principles emerged as fundamental to the PEPC program and how it operates. The principles—**innovation, efficiency, collaboration, and excellent customer service**—guided development of the goals and priorities found in this plan.

As leader and champion for the PEPC program, the Environmental Quality Division will use the strategic plan as a basis for advocating for the PEPC application and promoting its use throughout the service.



The Strategic Planning Process

The strategic plan was developed through a collaborative effort among the EQD PEPC team, the PEPC Advisory Council, and additional PEPC stakeholders within the National Park Service—including a WASO planning representative, two park resource managers, and a park superintendent. This core stakeholder group directly participated in the development of each element of the strategic plan.

Input from the core stakeholder group was gathered through four half-day strategic planning workshops. The workshops were conducted virtually during May and June 2013 and were facilitated by two representatives from the Denver Service Center's Planning Division. Between the workshops, participants completed surveys and submitted ideas for inclusion in the plan. During the facilitated sessions, participant input was discussed and refined, and consensus was built around each element of the plan. The facilitated sessions were structured to encourage participants to think holistically about the PEPC *program*, rather than the PEPC *application* alone.

After the facilitated sessions were completed, a draft of the strategic plan was circulated for comment among the core stakeholder group and a wider stakeholder group for review and comment. Their comments and feedback were incorporated into the final draft of the plan, as appropriate. The wider stakeholder group included representatives from the EQD management team, the environmental coordinators group, regional section 106 coordinators, PEPC user representatives, the planning leadership group, and park resource managers.



Mission and Vision Statements

The PEPC Program Mission

The mission articulates the purpose of the PEPC program, who it serves, and the benefits it creates.

Mission:

The PEPC program provides the National Park Service with information technology tools for efficient park planning and resource compliance, project tracking, and public engagement to support collaboration and informed decision making.

The PEPC Program Vision

The vision is an ideal description of the PEPC program into the future. It represents an optimal state to be strived for. This vision will be achieved if the program accomplishes its mission and goals.

Vision:

The PEPC program will support the National Park Service in being the leader and innovator among federal agencies in its integration of user-focused information technology tools with efficient park planning and resource compliance, project tracking, and public engagement.



Goals and Priorities

This section lists the key goals and priorities for the PEPC program for the next five years. Under each goal is a list of priorities that will aid in the accomplishment of the goal. Please note that the goals and priorities are not listed in order of importance.

Each goal is a long-term target or aim for the PEPC program. The goals describe what the program will seek to accomplish over the next five years. The goals provide the basis for decisions about the nature, scope, and relative priorities of all projects and activities. Each individual goal should help the PEPC program accomplish its mission and advance the program toward the vision.

Each priority is a measurable target that must be met on the way to attaining a goal. The priorities act as benchmarks for measuring progress. The priorities listed in this section represent key priorities—they articulate those areas where energy and resources should be focused to effect positive change. These priorities do not represent all the activities required to keep the program running smoothly and to meet the future needs of PEPC users.

Goal 1: Provide a broad range of efficient and user-focused tools for servicewide park planning and resource compliance activities

- Priority A.** On a regular basis, the PEPC Advisory Council and EQD PEPC team will review PEPC enhancement requests and develop a prioritized list of the most critical servicewide requests for completion. At least annually, this review should also include an assessment of compliance tools to ensure consistency with park planning and resource compliance laws, regulations, and requirements.
- Priority B.** Provide tools that target the information needs of individual users based on their responsibilities and subject matter expertise.
- Priority C.** Provide portfolio management tools¹ that will meet NPS needs for servicewide planning and project coordination.

Goal 2: Provide project tracking and review tools to maximize time savings and collaboration among NPS staff

- Priority A.** Use leading-edge technology to develop internal document review tools that will enable multiple reviewers to comment on and modify a document simultaneously, and provide a simple way to track and record individual comments.
- Priority B.** Use leading-edge technology to provide enhanced communication and scheduling tools. These tools should allow for real time interaction and collaboration.

1. Portfolio management tools provide ways to analyze and collectively manage a group of projects based on various key characteristics. For example, information from related projects within a geographic area could be aggregated.

Goal 3: Provide tools that promote meaningful and innovative public engagement

Priority A. Provide a toolkit for using information technology in public engagement efforts. The toolkit should focus on leading-edge social media technologies such as online interactive public engagement, virtual public meetings, podcasts, and webcasts.

Goal 4: Provide public comment analysis tools that emphasize intuition and versatility

Priority A. Provide an innovative and versatile toolset for comment analysis that is applicable to projects of varied type and complexity and promotes cost-effective analysis.

Goal 5: Provide education and outreach activities for NPS staff that emphasize collaboration and engaging formats

Priority A. Develop dynamic and interactive methods to engage users and promote understanding and use of the PEPC tools.

Priority B. Develop standardized training products suitable for delivery by PEPC experts throughout the National Park Service.

Priority C. Develop training products that are focused on the needs of specific user groups.

Goal 6: Provide excellent customer service that is prompt, personalized, and professional

Priority A. Use the members of the PEPC Advisory Council as a resource for delivering servicewide customer support.

Priority B. Ensure the help desk is well publicized and all inquiries are responded to by a member of the EQD PEPC team in a timely manner.

Goal 7: Provide a stable and durable system of tools including software, integration, and infrastructure now and into the future

Priority A. Create an integration strategy that prioritizes integration efforts between systems, based on feasibility and user benefit.

Priority B. Ensure the system's sustainability over the long term through documentation and research of current application, software, and database options.



Implementation Strategy

Effective strategic plans include mechanisms for implementing the plan and monitoring progress toward the goals and priorities included within them. This section describes how and when the EQD PEPC team and the PEPC Advisory Council will implement the strategic plan and monitor progress over the next five years.

- The goals and priorities will facilitate the creation of annual work plans for the PEPC program staff. As appropriate, the PEPC team will collaborate and consult with affected stakeholders as the goals and priorities are translated into the action level. Sequencing of priorities will be determined by the EQD PEPC team, and may be adjusted as needed to align with opportunities.
- The EQD PEPC team will periodically review the strategic plan to determine and record progress as well as identify next priorities.
- The PEPC Advisory Council will revisit the strategic plan annually to review progress and paths to achieving the goals and priorities.

The strategies above are intended to help the EQD PEPC team ensure the strategic plan remains a useful document over the next five years, through reasonably smooth and rapid implementation.



Conclusion

A number of factors create challenges and opportunities for the PEPC program—including an expanding base of users with different needs and preferences, technological advancements, and resource constraints.

The PEPC strategic plan serves as a framework to address these challenges and to guide decision making and resource allocation in the future. The overall intent of the plan is to improve the program during the next five years. To this end, the plan provides a succinct mission, an inspiring vision, clear goals, and priorities designed to address those areas where positive change is most needed. Program improvements will be guided by four principles: innovation, efficiency, collaboration, and excellent customer service. All together, the elements of this plan will help to ensure that the PEPC program effectively serves its current user base, and remains a valuable tool for the National Park Service into the future.

One of the primary strengths of the strategic plan is the collaborative approach used in its creation. Since its inception, one of the hallmarks of the PEPC program has been a system built by and for the user. This tradition was carried forward in this plan. The engagement of a wide variety of NPS stakeholders—representing parks, regions, WASO, and various NPS divisions—provided invaluable perspective and important ideas throughout the planning process. Participants played a direct role in creating an accurate picture of the program today, articulating user needs, and charting the most effective course forward.

Finally, the EQD PEPC team will continue to regularly collaborate with the PEPC Advisory Council for the continuing operation and improvement of the PEPC program. The insight and ideas of PAC members have been crucial in the development of the PEPC program thus far, and will remain vital as elements of this strategic plan are implemented.



Appendix A: SWOC Analysis

Prior to creating specific components of the strategic plan, participants identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges (SWOC) for the PEPC program. The strengths and weaknesses focused on internal factors, while opportunities and challenges focused on external factors. Overall, the SWOC analysis ensured that the planning process was factually grounded and that both internal and external factors were considered as the plan was created.

The SWOC analysis revealed two overarching issues that needed to be addressed by the strategic plan:

1. How can the PEPC application best serve a wide user base with a variety of different needs?
2. There is a need to clearly articulate the overall purpose of the program, clarify different categories of use for the program, and identify those categories of use where improvements would produce the most benefit.

The major themes identified in the SWOC analysis are shown below. Bullet points under “weaknesses” and “challenges” identify how those issues were addressed in the strategic plan.

Strengths

1. The PEPC application is user-friendly, customizable, and constantly improving.
2. The EQD PEPC team provides excellent customer service and is very responsive to user requests.
3. Diversity within the PEPC Advisory Council allows the PEPC program to understand the full range of user needs and preferences in the National Park Service.
4. The PEPC application is fulfilling its envisioned role as a clearinghouse for information—it consolidates critical information for planning and compliance into a single location.

Weaknesses

1. The system is constantly improving, but these improvements are not guided by overarching goals. This approach may eventually produce an unwieldy and overcomplicated system.
 - » This issue is addressed in the plan through the development of formally stated goals for the PEPC program.
2. Most people do not understand how the PEPC program differentiates user “needs” from user “wants.”
 - » This issue is addressed in the plan through Goal 1, Priority A.
3. The PEPC application is not well integrated with other major NPS systems. This creates a need for duplicative data entry by the user across different systems.
 - » This issue is addressed in the plan through Goal 7, Priority A.
4. The PEPC application faces competing databases—many people feel that the PEPC application is just another database with additional passwords and user names to remember.
 - » This issue is addressed in the plan through Goals 1–6, each of which are intended to improve the PEPC application and the user’s interaction with it.

Opportunities

1. If the PEPC program continues to focus on innovation, it could become the model for all Department of the Interior agencies. It could also be used for interagency consultation.
2. Continuing to improve PEPC application integration with the Project Management Information System and the Facility Management Software System will produce time and cost savings for NPS employees.
3. Improving the tools for public involvement and comment could produce substantial time and cost savings for a variety of users—both within and outside the National Park Service—and allow for more meaningful public involvement in NPS planning.

Challenges

1. In order to innovate, effectively allocate resources, and compete with other databases, the managers of the PEPC program need to think about the basic “service” it provides and move away from a strict “product” focus.
 - » This issue is addressed in the plan through the creation of a program “vision” and “mission,” and by formally stating program goals in relation to the vision and mission.
2. Competing information technology systems and emerging technologies could undermine the use and value of PEPC.
 - » This issue is addressed in the plan through Goals 1–7, each of which are intended to improve the PEPC application and the user’s interaction with it.
3. How to promote a system that facilitates required processes but whose use is not mandated servicewide is challenging. In addition, the PEPC application lacks high-level sponsorship and servicewide buy-in.
 - » The Environmental Quality Division will use the written strategic plan as a basis for advocating for the PEPC application and promoting its use throughout the service.



Appendix B: Workshop Participant List and Preparers

Core Stakeholder Group

Richard Anderson, *Environmental Protection Specialist*, Alaska Region

Karen Cantwell, *Environmental Protection Specialist*, Pacific West Region

Brian Carlstrom, *Superintendent*, Biscayne National Park

Kara Deutsch, *Chief, Resource Management and Science*, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area

Thomas Flanagan, *Chief, Environmental Information Management Branch*, EQD

Julie Fleming, *PEPC System Manager*

Patrick Gregerson, *Chief, Office of Park Planning and Special Studies*, WASO

Kristen Hamilton, *Environmental Protection Specialist*, National Mall & Memorial Parks

Sabrina Henry, *Biological Science Technician*, Canyonlands / Southeast Utah Group

Matt Hunnell, *Lead PEPC Developer, Contractor*

Shannon Kruse, *PEPC Environmental Protection Specialist*

Patrick Mackay, *PEPC Developer, Contractor*

Susan McPartland, *Visitor Use Management Specialist*, Denver Service Center-Planning

Sue Mills, *Natural Resource Specialist*, Yellowstone National Park

Michael Molling, *Facility Manager*, Blue Ridge Parkway

Suzette Molling, *Environmental Protection Specialist*, Blue Ridge Parkway

Bruce Peacock, *Chief, Environmental Quality Division*

Cheryl Sams, *Historical Landscape Architect*, Northeast Region

Kevin Skerl, *Chief, Natural Resources*, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore

Melissa Stedeford, *Environmental Protection Specialist*, EQD

Chris Stubbs, *Chief, Division of Resources Management*, Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park

Chris Turk, *PEPC Volunteer*

Lori Yokomizo, *Web Developer*, Denver Service Center

Plan Preparers And Facilitators

Ken Bingenheimer, *Editor*, Denver Service Center - Planning

Sarah Bodo, *Planner*, Denver Service Center-Planning

Danielle Hernandez, *Visual Information Specialist*, Denver Service Center-Planning

Ray McPadden, *Planner*, Denver Service Center-Planning

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