

**Forest Service Manual  
National Headquarters - Washington Office  
Washington, DC**

**Forest Service Manual 2300 – Recreation, Wilderness, And Related Resource Management  
Chapter 2390 - Interpretive Services**

**Amendment:** 2300-2011-1

**Effective date:** August 15, 2011

**Duration:** This amendment is effective until superseded or removed.

**Approved by:** James M. Pena, Associate Deputy Chief, NFS

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**Responsible Staff:**

**Last Change:** 2300-2009-2 to 2350

**Superseded Document(s):** 2390, Amendment 2300-90-1, June 1, 1990

**Digest:** Following is an explanation of the changes throughout the directive by section.

**2390.1:** Adds new authorities and cross-reference to building authorities listed in FSM 7310 and FSH 7309.11.

**2390.2 - 2390.3:** Revises and updates objectives and policies.

**2390.4:** Revises responsibility section to change codes and captions for consistency and adds new responsibilities throughout.

**2390.5:** Adds new definitions for terminology specific to this chapter.

**2393:** Establishes new code and caption “Construction of New Visitor Centers and Interpretive Sites” and sets forth new direction for the planning, design-build, and long-term operation and maintenance of new visitor centers and interpretive sites owned and operated by the Forest Service.

**2394:** Establishes new code and caption “Construction of New Visitor Centers and Interpretive Sites – Under the Jurisdiction of Multiple Agencies and use of Non-Forest System Funds” and sets forth new direction.

**2395:** Recodes this section of the directive previously set out in FSM 1643.

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**2396:** Establishes code and caption for “Personal Services” and sets forth new direction for public services.

**2397:** Reorganizes and recodes the entire section of 2393 and adds new codes and captions where applicable for the new or revised direction.

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### 2390.1 - Authorities

1. Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (42 U.S.C. 12101-12211). This act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, State and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation, and telecommunications.
2. Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) of 1968, as amended (46 U.S.C. 4151). This act requires that buildings and facilities that are designed, constructed, or altered with Federal funds, or leased by a Federal agency, comply with Federal standards for physical accessibility. ABA requirements are limited to architectural standards in new and altered buildings and in newly leased facilities. They do not address the activities conducted in those buildings and facilities.
3. Cooperative Funds and Deposit Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-148). This law provides the fundamental legal authority for the Forest Service to work with Interpretive Associations.
4. Department of Agriculture Organic Act of 1862 (7 U.S.C. 2201). This act authorizes establishment of a Department of Agriculture to "diffuse among the people of the United States useful information on subjects connected with agriculture in the most general and comprehensive sense of the word."
5. Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resource Research Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. 1600 (note)). This act authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to implement a comprehensive program of forest and rangeland renewable resources research and dissemination of the findings of such research.
6. National Historic Preservation Act Amendments of 1980 (Public Law 96-515, 94 Stat. 2987; 16 U.S.C. 470). This act authorizes preservation of the Nation's irreplaceable heritage.
7. Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794). This act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by Federal agencies, in programs receiving Federal financial assistance, in Federal employment, and in the employment practices of Federal contractors.
8. Solicitor's Opinion 4088 (1942). The Solicitor ruled that information may be disseminated through exhibits, motion pictures, radio broadcasts, or other media which are found to be administratively expedient, provided such information relates to the authorized activities of the Department, and it is administratively determined that such dissemination of information is reasonably requisite or materially advantageous in the promotion and development of such Department activities.

Forest Service Manual (FSM) 7310.1 and Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 7309.11 lists several other authorities that grant the Forest Service permission to erect, alter, and repair buildings and other structures and to expend funds for such purposes.

## 2390.2 - Objectives

1. Forge intellectual and emotional connections between people and the nation's forests and grasslands and community green spaces through meaningful interpretive opportunities.
2. Enhance resource management and ensure the long-term sustainability of landscapes and the conservation of natural and cultural resources.
3. Assist in managing visitor capacity and influencing on-site behavior such as reducing user conflicts, protection of the resource, and enabling visitors to make accurate risk assessments and take appropriate safety precautions.
4. Achieve strategic communication on a variety of resource issues and management practices through interpretive planning, using the best available science, contemporary media, and interdisciplinary collaboration.
5. Provide life-long learning and a variety of fully accessible opportunities for all age groups, on-site, off-site and virtually resulting in repeat visits, volunteerism, and increased understanding of nation's heritage and conservation legacy.
6. Establish and provide for a variety of partnerships and opportunities for visitors to become citizen stewards and to contribute to the economic vitality and diversity of local and regional communities.

## 2390.3 - Policy

In addition to general recreation policies in FSM 2303, the following policies guide the Interpretive Services program.

1. Interpretive Sites.
  - a. Priority attention and funding must be given to the operation, maintenance, and renewal of existing interpretive infrastructure and media, so they remain relevant and contemporary.
  - b. Additional funding from alternative sources such as recreation fees, capital improvement program (CIP), grants, special use permits and cost share agreements will be sought to advance the delivery of Interpretive Services.
  - c. Sustainable landscape practices and sustainable operations will be integrated into all aspects of Interpretive Services to reduce energy, fuel, water consumption and green house gases, and to implement green purchasing and recycling efforts with partners and the public.
2. Interpretive Programming.

- a. Programming uses the best available science, current professional industry standards and best practices for delivering personal and non-personal interpretation.
- b. Interpretive and education plans are current and have involved local entities in identifying the relevant themes and needs and interests of target audiences.
- c. Evaluation of programs and events are based on measurable objectives. Program activities are revised according to evaluation results and noted changes in the interests of the audience and media technology.
- d. Partnerships with Interpretive Associations and other community organizations are highly valued for assisting with:
  - (1) The development of interpretive and education materials;
  - (2) Delivery of high-quality customer services; and
  - (3) Building community support and engagement, and reaching under-represented populations.

#### **2390.4 - Responsibility**

##### **2390.41 - Washington Office**

###### **2390.41a - Chief, Forest Service**

The Chief delegates the authority to enter into agreements with interpretative associations to the regional foresters. This authority may be redelegated.

###### **2390.41b - Deputy Chief, National Forest System**

The Deputy Chief, National Forest System has the authority to approve the design and construction of new visitor centers, interpretive sites, and visitor contact stations in the lobbies of new administrative offices or recreation sites costing over \$250,000.

###### **2390.41c - Washington Office, Director, Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources**

The Director of Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources has the authority and responsibility to:

1. Establish guidelines, standards, training competencies, and monitoring the effectiveness of the Interpretive Services program, courteous public service and personal services and non-personal services, by conducting administrative and program reviews and developing reports.

2. Promote that every employee has a responsibility towards providing exceptional public service, knowing where to get timely and accurate information, and enhancing visitors' experiences.
3. Advise the Deputy Chief of National Forest System whether to approve or deny requests for the design and construction of new visitor centers, interpretive sites, and visitor contact stations as stand-alone facilities, recreation sites, or in the lobbies of administrative sites costing more than \$250,000.
4. Approve or denying region, station and Area requests for permanent and temporary exhibits costing \$100,000 or more.
5. Coordinate with the Director of Engineering on:
  - a. The development, construction, and long-term maintenance of visitor centers and interpretive sites, including but not limited to: sustainable building design, LEED certification, capital improvement program and working capital fund assessment (See FSM 7300);
  - b. Forest visitor map sales and management of the map fund; and
  - c. Internal and external exhibits and signs (FSM 7100 & FSH 7309.11).
6. Coordinate with Forest Service and other social and natural resource scientists to conduct original research or assist with the technological transfer of information and scientific evidence relative to natural, cultural and social subject matter and processes.

**2390.41d - Washington Office, Director, Engineering**

The Director of Engineering shall coordinate with the Director of Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources on:

1. The development, construction, and long-term maintenance of visitor centers and interpretive sites, including but not limited to: sustainable building design, LEED certification, capital improvement program and working capital fund assessment (FSM 7300);
2. Forest visitor maps and management of the map fund; and
3. Internal and external exhibits and signs (See FSH 7309.1).

**2390.41e - Washington Office, Program Manager, Interpretive Services**

It is the responsibility of the Interpretive Services Program Manager to:

1. Plan for short-term tactical resources and establishing long-term strategic direction for the Interpretive Services Program.

2. Formulate servicewide policies for courteous public service, planning and implementing interpretive and educational plans and programs, as well as establishing standards, evaluation criteria, and performance measures for Interpretive Services.
3. Ensure that Interpretive Services is accurately represented in budget documents, performance measures, and accountability reports.
4. Coordinate the review process and make recommendations to the Director, Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources, for the approval or denial of construction of new visitor centers, interpretive sites and other interpretive infrastructure, such as visitor contact stations in the lobbies of new administrative or recreation sites costing more than \$250,000 (FSM 7300).
5. Provide a recommendation to the Director, Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources, for the approval or denial of proposals for permanent and temporary exhibits costing more than \$100,000.
6. Oversee the policy and direction for the establishment and administration of Interpretive Associations, as well as other strategic partnerships for the delivery of high-quality Interpretive Services and visitor experiences.
7. Identify and implement training and technical assistance for employees to ensure professional development and achieve long-range position management objectives.
8. Coordinate Interpretive Services with other directors, such as Conservation Education, Engineering, Office of Communication, Grants and Agreements, National Partnership Office, and Watershed, Fish, Wildlife, Air and Rare Plants.

#### **2390.42 - Regional Foresters, Station Directors and Area Director**

It is the responsibility of the regional foresters, station directors and Area Director to:

1. Submit formal, written requests to the Deputy Chief, National Forest System, for the construction of new visitor centers, interpretive sites, and visitor contact stations to be housed in newly-constructed buildings or administrative sites (Supervisor, District, Research and Area offices) costing more than \$250,000.
2. Maintain line officer authority for approving permanent and temporary exhibits costing from \$25,000 to \$99,999, thereby ensuring the quality of the product and priority use of funds and ensuring that those decisions are made at the most effective level of the organization.
3. Prioritize the review and replacement of interpretive exhibits and media, and submit proposals for permanent, wayside, temporary and traveling exhibits costing \$100,000 or more to the Washington Office, Director, Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources for review and approval.



4. Develop regional priorities, policies, and coordinate regional organizational units in accordance with national policy and guidelines.
5. Engage employees with interpretive skills to serve as internal consultants across program and geographic areas, thereby, leveraging employee technical skills and increasing the professional quality of planning, design, fabrication, and implementation of interpretive plans, products, or services.
6. Establish integrated interpretive and educational plans and programs that:
  - a. Support strategic communication of resource management priorities,
  - b. Ensure cost-effectiveness, and
  - c. Avoid duplication of effort, services, and products.
7. Approve Master Interpretive Association Agreements, and may delegate the approval of sales items to the forest supervisor.
8. Collaborate with partners and the public to expand efforts to provide integrated visitor experiences while reducing the Agency's environmental footprint and the effects of climate change.

**2390.42a - Regional Interpretive Services Program Manager**

The Regional Interpretive Services Program Manager shall:

1. Assist the Washington Office in identifying short-term tactical resources and establishing long-term strategic direction for the Interpretive Services Program.
2. Provide direction on interpretive planning, exhibit design and production, and interpretive program management to field units and others as appropriate.
3. Ensure the Interpretive Services Program is appropriately represented in regional and forest budget documents, performance measures, and accountability reports.
4. Work with regional office Recreation and Engineering staffs during:
  - a. Design and construction of new visitor center facilities and interpretive sites;
  - b. Capital Improvement Program (CIP) process;
  - c. CIP project teams, especially those established to develop new, remodel existing, or otherwise update administrative sites, administrative offices, visitor centers, scenic byways, and other interpretive infrastructure; and
  - d. Review of Forest Visitor Maps and interpretive signs.

5. Coordinate the development of proposals from the regional foresters, station directors or Area Director to the Deputy Chief, National Forest System, Washington Office for construction of new visitor centers, major interpretive sites, and visitor contact stations in the lobbies of new administrative and recreation sites costing more than \$250,000.
6. Provide recommendations to the regional forester, station director or Area Director, or designee to approve or deny proposals for permanent or temporary exhibits with a total estimated cost (design and fabrication) ranging from \$25,000 to \$99,999.
7. Provide recommendations to the forest supervisor or designee to approve or deny proposals for permanent or temporary exhibits with a total estimated cost less than \$25,000.
8. Establish, monitor, and manage relationships with Interpretive Associations, and provide oversight of the region's Interpretive Association operations.
9. Identify and implement training and technical assistance for employees to ensure professional development and achieve long-range position management objectives.
10. Assist the Washington Office in developing policy and direction for the establishment and administration of Interpretive Associations, as well as partnerships with other community partners for delivering Interpretive Services.

#### **2390.43 - Forest Supervisors**

It is the responsibility of forest supervisors to:

1. Establish integrated interpretive and educational plans that:
  - a. Align with other forest-level planning documents;
  - b. Support strategic communication of resource management priorities;
  - c. Ensure cost-effectiveness; and
  - d. Avoid duplication of effort, services, and products.
2. Submit formal requests to the regional forester to convey to the Washington Office, Director of Recreation, Heritage, and Volunteer Resources for construction of new visitor centers, major interpretive sites, and visitor contact stations in the lobbies of new administrative sites (Supervisor and District offices) costing more than \$250,000.
3. Submit formal requests to the regional forester for approval of proposals for permanent or temporary exhibits costing from \$25,000 to \$99,999.
4. Maintain line officer authority for approving permanent, temporary, and traveling exhibits costing less than \$25,000 in consultation with the Regional Interpretive Services

Program Manager to ensure quality and priority use of funds, and so that decisions are made at the most effective level of the organization.

5. Initiate and prepare the development, operation, maintenance, and rehabilitation schedules (condition surveys) for visitor centers and interpretive sites, services, interpretive equipment, and media.

#### **2390.44 - District Rangers**

It is the responsibility of district rangers to:

1. Develop district operation, maintenance, and rehabilitation schedules for interpretive facilities, services, and media, and include them as part of the district's overall Recreation Program Operation and Maintenance Plan.
2. Coordinate the development of project proposals for submittal to the forest supervisor to convey to the regional forester for construction of new visitor centers, interpretive sites, and visitor contact stations in the lobbies of new administrative sites (Supervisor and District offices) costing more than \$250,000.
3. Coordinate the development for project proposals for submittal to the regional forester for approval for permanent, temporary and traveling exhibits and facilities costing from \$25,000 to \$99,999.
4. Coordinate the development of project proposals for submittal to the forest supervisor for approval for permanent, temporary, and traveling exhibits costing less than \$25,000.

#### **2390.45 - Forest Service Enterprise Teams and Service Centers**

It is the responsibility of the enterprise teams and other service centers to:

1. Provide a spectrum of technical services related to Interpretive Services, provided employees meet professional qualifications, in the areas of: interpretive planning, wayside exhibits, audiovisual productions, interpretive and directional signs, and the development and contracting of the design, fabrication and installation of exhibits.
2. Provide assistance with interpretive and visitor experiences planning relative to other Forest Service planning documents and the principles of sustainable recreation.
3. Adhere to and maintaining program standards, evaluation criteria, and accountability for interpretive planning, media and design and production with field units.
4. Adhere to accessibility standards, thereby meeting the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act Section 504 and 508, accommodating a variety of learning styles, and/or meeting the needs of those from other cultures (such as non-English speaking visitors), or children.

## 2390.5 - Definitions

Conservation Education Plan. Targets specific age group, meets national and/or state education standards, usually has a captive audience.

Contact Station. A staffed structure on-site or off-site with the primary purpose of providing information and orientation to the visitor. The contact station is similar to a visitor center, but generally provides fewer services. It generally does not have exhibits with museum objects.

Education. Consists of comprehensive curriculum-based programs conducted on- or off-site, for all ages, which are created cooperatively with educators. These programs include all curriculum-based programs that generally include a pre-visit, on-site visit, and post-visit activities. Field institutes, field studies or school groups that attend non-curriculum programs during a site visit are not categorized as education but rather interpretation.

Exhibit. An educational display usually consisting of museum objects accompanied by explanatory text and images, open to the public on a regular schedule.

a. Static exhibits. A series of comprehensive, integrated permanent exhibits with text and images but with no moving parts; includes but is not limited to: flat panel, two dimensional or 3-D exhibits such as dioramas. The exhibit includes the housing, kiosk, and/or framing structures as well as any needed wiring or specialized lighting.

b. Interactive exhibits. A series of comprehensive, integrated permanent exhibits with moving parts that may also use computer or audio-visual hardware and software. The exhibit includes the housing, kiosk, and/or framing structures as well as any needed wiring, specialized lighting, speakers and audio components, computer connections, and/or required cooling systems.

c. Multimedia exhibit. An exhibit using, involving, or encompassing several media, such as projected images, sound, museum objects, and moving parts.

d. Permanent exhibit. An exhibit that is on display for an extended period, usually many years, and does not have a predetermined closing date.

e. Temporary exhibit. An exhibit that has published opening and closing dates and is usually open for several weeks or months.

f. Traveling exhibit. An exhibit that is displayed at multiple venues and is shipped from one location to the next according to a schedule. It may, or may not, include museum objects.

g. Virtual exhibit. An exhibit on the World Wide Web featuring explanatory text and images.

h. Wayside exhibit. An exhibit consisting of explanatory signage near a point of interest, often along a trail, walk, parking area, or road. Typically, discreet objects are not are part of a wayside exhibit, however, depending on the site and subject matter it may be appropriate to incorporate an object.

Exhibit Plan. Specific to an exhibit or set of exhibits, pertains to a visitor center, scenic byway or interpretive trail. The plan includes goals and objectives for each exhibit and specific text outlines, recommendations for graphics and images, and cost estimates. Depending on the scope and complexity of the plan, it may include draft exhibit text and conceptual designs.

Formal interpretation. Consists of on-site, pre-planned, presentations that have a theme, goal, and objectives with desired measurable outcomes. The presentations are designed to provoke visitors to form their own intellectual or emotional connection with the resource. The presentations are scheduled or announced prior to being presented, e.g. presentations at a visitor center or a guided tour or interpretive walk.

Friends Group. Usually a place-based, non-profit organization, with the purpose of supporting a place or activities. Friends Groups have unique by-laws or charter. They can organize and train volunteers; raise funds to be donated to the agency; and can advocate for activities, agency, purpose, or collaboration.

Informal Interpretation. Consists of spontaneous interpretive contacts with visitors. These contacts may occur in a variety of settings, primarily on NFS lands. This category includes stationary as well as roving interpretation.

Information Service Plans. A plan that provides information, orientation and awareness of Forest Service programs, activities and services.

Interpretation. A mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource.

Interpretive Association. A non-profit organization whose mission is to provide interpretation and environmental education. Under a participating agreement, Interpretive Associations operate sales outlets in Forest Service visitor centers, interpretive sites and administrative buildings; sell forest visitor maps; recreation passes; and may assist with managing volunteers.

Interpretive Products to Standard.

- a. Interpretive presentations and media proposals meet unit Interpretation Plan direction and FSM guidelines;
- b. Interpretive presentations and media meet industry and professional guidelines for quality and appropriateness;

- c. Messages are contemporary and relevant; and
- d. Interpretive presentations, publications, displays, web sites and visual aids are accessible.

**Interpretive and Education Plan.** Focuses on the interpretive and education components of a Forest Service unit, area or site. The plan addresses architectural and site issues, and provides direction for complementary messages, programming, and use of media for delivering interpretation and education to a variety of audiences. An Interpretive and Education Plan also ensures that facilities and programming are accessible and free of barriers for both physical passage and communication, such as, visual, hearing and language.

Each national forest or grassland will have an identifiable Interpretive and Education Plan to guide the development, production, and delivery of interpretive and conservation education products, including addressing media, programs, exhibits and services on an annual basis. Plans may span any reasonable geographic area from a recreation complex to an entire national forest or grassland.

**Interpretive Master Plan.** Typically written at the forest level, brings together forest-wide interpretive efforts and tiers to other forest plans.

**Interpretive Plan.** For a facility, site or area, more specific than a master plan, focus is on an individual site, facility or special interest area.

**Interpretive Exhibit Proposal.** The exhibit proposal is completed after an Interpretive and Education Plan is completed, and is generally used to develop a design concept to the point where it can be used to gain support and funding for the fabrication process. It may be used to solicit bids for design and/or construction of interpretive media.

**Interpretive Sites.**

- a. **Interpretive Site – Administrative.** Site that includes those portions of administrative sites and offices that have been modified to provide interpretive programs and/or interpretive displays.
- b. **Interpretive Site – Major.** (Visitor Center) Nationally defined list of Forest Service-owned and operated centers that are regionally or nationally significant destination sites. Site has major visitor center building, with interpretive exhibits and interpretive audio-visual and live programs. Site may also have associated amphitheatre, interpretive trails and other features; permanent year-round interpretive and maintenance staff, and replacement value of improvements (based on original investment cost) is greater than \$2,000,000. Also see: Recreation Fees, FSH 2309.13, Destination Visitor or Interpretive Center.

c. Interpretive Site – Minor. Site managed to provide a range of interpretive programs, services and facilities. Site includes a building or buildings currently used as an interpretive visitor center.

Site has interpretive exhibits and may have interpretive audio-visual and/or live programs. Site may have permanent staff, but typically is staffed on a seasonal basis, and the replacement value of improvements is less than \$2,000,000.

Interpretive Sign, Exhibit, or Kiosk. Constructed features that convey information about local cultural or natural resources by telling a story that holds meaning and interest for visitors emotionally and intellectually.

Interpretive Trails. Typically, a short walking path with interpretive signs that address local natural or cultural resources and management issues presented in a way to encourage visitors to forge emotional and intellectual connections with the information.

Logic Model. An organizing tool or picture of how an interpretive or educational organization or program works. A logic model links short and long-term outcomes with program activities and processes and the theoretical assumptions of the program through tiered objectives: outputs, outcomes, and impacts. Logic models can be useful in evaluating a program.

Mutual Benefit. Reflects a relationship between the Forest Service and the cooperator when the parties have a shared interest in, contribute resources to the accomplishment of, and mutually benefit from (other than from monetary consideration), the objective of the agreement; the agreement between the parties has aspects of both a procurement contract and cooperative agreement, as those instruments are described in chapter 63 of title 31, United States Code; and meets the objective of being in the public interest. (Also see FSM 1580)

Non-personal Interpretation. Interpretive media that do not require a person to deliver a message (that is, exhibits, waysides, brochures, signs, magazines, books, and so forth).

Outreach Programs. Consists of community programs which are off-site programs provided to community audiences such as clubs, church groups, elder hostels, scouts, and special events and fairs. In addition, websites and other promotional media can be considered as outreach programs.

Personal Interpretation. One person or persons providing interpretation to another person or persons.

Underserved Population. Individuals and groups who have traditionally not had access to environmental education or interpretive programs, activities, or experiences, usually for reasons of race, income, language, location, social status, or religion.

Visitor Information Services (VIS). Refers to the front desk employees primarily at Regional, Supervisor, and District Offices who serve the public by providing information, and selling permits, passes and maps.

## **2391 - General Administration**

To achieve the stated policies and objectives, management shall:

### **2391.1 - Reporting**

1. Ensure accurate and timely data entry related to interpretive equipment, infrastructure, and personal and non-personal interpretation into the appropriate corporate databases.
2. Ensure the programmatic aspects of Interpretive Services are integrated into planning documents, such as, but not limited to: budget formulation and execution, program of work statements, data calls, capital improvement projects, and strategic planning efforts.

### **2391.2 - National and Regional Awards**

The efforts of exemplary employees performing interpretive and conservation education work will be annually recognized through the presentation of regional and national Gifford Pinchot Interpretive and Conservation Education awards.

## **2392 - Interpretive Planning**

Interpretive planning blends the needs of management and resource considerations with visitor interests and desires, resulting in increased visitor awareness and participatory stewardship of the resources.

### **2392.02 - Objectives**

1. When conducting interpretive planning it is the goal of the Forest Service to:
  - a. Use an interdisciplinary process that includes external stakeholders and diverse cultural populations, and is conducted by personnel with formal training in developing interpretive plans, or related planning expertise.
  - b. Identify new programs that address defined goals and interpretive media developed to convey core thematic messages that meet diverse audience needs.
  - c. Use a logic model or performance metrics to generate outcomes and objectives and to assist with evaluating the plan within five years.
  - d. Modify and renew plans with approval of the line officer.
2. The management objectives for establishing and managing visitor centers and interpretive sites are to:



- a. Aid forest and grassland personnel in accomplishing management objectives.
- b. Enhance communities; cultivate community engagement through establishing partnerships with federal, state and local agencies, non-profit educational or other interest groups, individuals and volunteers.
- c. Orient the visitor to the forest, its cultural and natural history, and its recreational opportunities.
- d. Enhance the public's understanding of the multidimensional role of the Forest Service and its contributions to the nation, communities, and citizens.
- e. Enhance the public's awareness and understanding of the purpose and operation of the field unit, and the economic, social and environmental benefits of the nation's forests and grasslands and community green spaces.
- f. Develop public appreciation for the sustainable use of resources.
- g. Promote citizen stewardship of public lands.

### **2393 - Construction of New Visitor Centers and Interpretive Sites**

The following applies to the planning, design-build, and long-term operation and maintenance of new visitor centers (major and minor) and interpretive sites owned and operated by the Forest Service. When authorizing the construction of new visitor centers and interpretive sites, costing more than \$250,000 dollars:

1. Give first priority and direct agency funding to existing sites and programs to ensure they are viable, accessible, contemporary and relevant to visitors and local communities.
2. Carefully evaluate the need and long-term investment (value analysis or feasibility study) costs for these sites, including long-term operation and maintenance costs.
3. Require written approval from Washington Office for new construction projects prior to initial concept and design.
4. Avoid phase development unless there is known revenue available and/or a solid documented financial commitment from partners to aid in the completion of the phases.
5. Use an integrated design approach, with a variety of professional disciplines, so the building and exhibits are done in tandem and completed concurrently, to provide a cohesive visitor experience.
6. Ensure that accurate budget estimates are used for building and exhibit construction costs. Also ensure that operation and maintenance estimates are accurate and appropriate for the scope of the project based on regional and national facilities comparisons. These

estimates should be provided as part of the feasibility study and for regional and Washington approvals.

7. Support and complement the mission of the Agency, current resources and management concerns, and planning documents like Forest Plans, Built Environment Image Guide, and the Recreational Opportunity Spectrum.

#### **2394 - Construction of Interpretive Sites Under the Jurisdiction of Multiple Agencies and Use of Non Forest Service Funds**

Also included are interpretive sites constructed in conjunction with special areas, such as scenic byways, wild and scenic rivers, national historic and recreation trails, and other linear recreation sites.

1. When a proposal for a new visitor center or interpretive site includes federal lands under the jurisdiction of or in conjunction with another federal agency, such as the Bureau of Land Management or National Park Service, the Forest Service will meet with officials from the other agency early in the design process.
2. All involved agencies will determine the project lead for the design and construction phases of the new visitor center or interpretive site. Collaborative agreements will be established and will define roles and responsibilities and will guide the development and the subsequent management, maintenance, and operation costs.
  - a. The site and exhibit proposals should be processed in accordance with regulations, policies, and other requirements of each agency. The Forest Service should ensure accurate and appropriate representation of the Agency's mission, management practices, and messages.
  - b. Exhibit or visitor center grant proposals (such as those for scenic byways) must clearly define land ownership, and operation and management responsibilities of proposed site, and exhibits.

#### **2395 - Exhibits and Displays**

To ensure the professional quality of permanent, traveling or wayside exhibits and displays:

1. Adhere to Departmental and Forest Service design criteria and industry standards in the production of interpretive products, and ensure design components portray the laws, regulations, Departmental requirements, and Forest Service mission with corporate identification.
2. Use universal design criteria, and ensure that exhibits and displays are executed at the best value to the taxpayer, and in the best interest of the Government.
3. Engage qualified interpretive and other design professionals early in design process.

4. Conduct annual condition surveys beginning at the age of 5 years, with replacement targeted at 20 percent of square footage per year from that point on. Condition surveys will assess exhibits on currency and accuracy of message, accessibility, and level of serviceability and repair. Condition surveys will be conducted by a combined team of forest, regional, and technical specialists.
  - a. Visitor Centers will be reviewed every 5 years for operations and maintenance costs versus visitation, and agency mission.
  - b. A checklist of survey items will be developed by the national and regional interpretive specialists.
5. Adhere to dollar limits and Regional and Washington Office approval processes outlined below:
  - a. Permanent, temporary exhibits and waysides with an estimated total cost (design and fabrication) of \$100,000 or more, factoring in inflationary costs, will be reviewed by Regional Office Interpretive Services Program manager or designee. The regional forester will then submit proposals for these permanent and temporary exhibits to the Washington Office, Deputy Chief, National Forest System for written approval.
  - b. Permanent, temporary exhibits and waysides with an estimated total cost (design and fabrication) of from \$25,000 to \$99,999 will be reviewed and approved by the Regional Office, Recreation Director, in consultation with the Regional Office Interpretive Services Program Manager or program designee.
  - c. Permanent, temporary exhibits and waysides with an estimated total cost (design and fabrication) of less than \$25,000 will be approved by the forest supervisor in consultation with the Regional Office Interpretive Services Program Manager, Forest Interpretive Specialist or program designee.

### **2396 - Personal Services**

Interpretive Services Program will make responsive and courteous public service the foundation of all of its public contact, by:

1. Providing personal services through employees, volunteers, Interpretive Association employees or concessionaires, to ensure effective opportunities for emotional and intellectual connections between the resource and visitors.
2. Emphasizing skills and service values in recruitment and selection criteria for public contact positions.
3. Training all employees, volunteers, and partners to provide responsive and courteous service and basic interpretive techniques to enhance all public contacts.

4. Monitoring public contact as an element of the Interpretive Services Program during management and activity reviews (FSM 1410).
5. Reviewing and adjusting policies and procedures, when necessary, to ensure courteous, responsive public service.
6. Evaluating customer service programs according to industry standards.

### **2397 - Interpretive Association Management**

To enhance the experiences of visitors and supports interpretive and educational efforts of the Agency, Interpretive Services will:

1. Designate a regional and/or forest liaison to be the point of contact and technical expert on matters pertaining to Interpretive Associations.
2. Recruit Interpretive Associations, with purposes and missions that align with those of the Agency, potential organizations will demonstrate professional expertise in retail, merchandising and marketing, and experience in non-profit management.
3. Enter into a participating agreement (FSM 1580) with an Interpretive Association, it is the goal of the Forest Service to:
  - a. Ensure cooperative efforts are of mutual benefit and serve the public interest; support the Agency's interpretive and education programs; and assist visitors by providing interpretive, educational, and informational materials and services to enhance their enjoyment and understanding of the natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources of the National Forests and Grasslands.
  - b. Foster a partnership that is synergistic and serves to strengthen the Forest Service's relationship with visitors, residents, and organizations in the local community.
  - c. Use the Interpretive Association participating agreement as the legal instrument for this mutual benefit partnership (See FSM 1580).
  - d. Federally-owned or controlled space and/or equipment may be used for, or involved in, association operations, as they can serve as the Agency's non-cash, in-kind contribution.
  - e. Interpretive Associations may offer a variety of public services, including but not limited to operation and management of sales outlets, producing and disseminating information, interpretive and education materials and services, selling forest visitor maps and recreation passes, managing volunteers, collecting and allocating donations for agency projects, identifying and securing grant funding, and assisting with special events provided the activities are stipulated in a legal instrument and as part of the operating plan.

- f. An annual operating plan, performance and financial reports are required. The annual operating plan may include such items as: dates and hours of operation, uniforms, reporting, sales areas and items, building use, utilities, copyrighting, visitor center management, donations to the forest, including the use of donation boxes, and support of interpretive/conservation education projects and programs.
  - g. Annual reporting of Interpretive Association activities will be entered into the appropriate corporate database.
  - h. The participating agreement will establish the procedures for the review and approval of all sale items offered by the interpretive association in agency facilities.
  - i. Forest Service employees may handle Interpretive Association cash receipts, inventory, and materials provided they are separately accounted for and the work is an incidental part of their official duties.
  - j. Interpretive Association funds may be deposited directly into an association account by a Forest Service employee with the approval of the association.
  - k. Interpretive Association receipts will be used in accordance with the terms of the agreement and in consultation with the Forest Service liaison to ensure priority interpretation and education projects are accomplished (FSM 1509.11, sec. 92.1).
4. The Forest Service must respect and maintain an Interpretive Association's status as a separate and independent entity. Agency employees may become members of the association, but cannot serve on the Board of Directors. Forest Service employees must adhere to agency ethics regulations in all Interpretive Association matters.
5. Materials published by the Federal Government are considered public domain and may be reproduced and distributed by Interpretive Associations. The sale of any of these items should be approved prior to any reproduction.
6. When a concessionaire and an Interpretive Association are operating at the same agency location, the Forest Service adheres to the provisions of both legal instruments and clarifies the rights and responsibilities of each.