Asset Priority Index Criteria

The Asset Priority Index (API)

The API is a balanced scorecard approach that allows park managers and decision-makers to compare the relative importance of facilities in relation to one another. This metric, in conjunction with other asset management considerations, can be used to create an overall asset management strategy. Parks faced with budget cuts and shrinking resources may use this metric as a compelling, data-driven case for reducing maintenance to one facility type where similar facilities exist. Similarly, it may indicate where assets could be targeted for disposition during long-range planning, as well as project funding priorities.
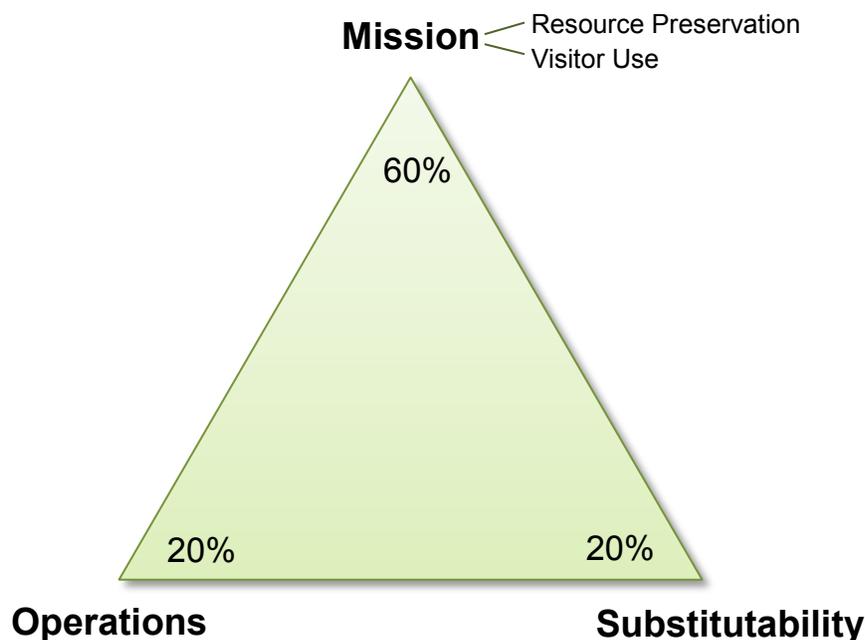
Mission — Resource Preservation
Visitor Use

60%

20% 20%

Operations **Substitutability**

Figure 1: API Criteria Relative to Each Other

The API uses a 100-point scale and is based upon four criteria: resource preservation (natural and cultural), visitor use, park operations, and substitutability. A web-based questionnaire assists an interdisciplinary team of park personnel to determine API values. The following pages contain the specific criteria used.

Each criterion should be evaluated against an individual asset starting from the lowest to highest to determine the level that most accurately defines that asset.

Interpretive media assets are unique since they are located within or along other built assets; their score will be the same as the host asset. In the case of a theme-based interpretive media asset whose component waysides are located along a number of host assets, the API will be determined by the host asset with the highest API.

General Guidance

The Asset Priority Index (API) is a measure of an asset's importance to the missions of both the National Park Service and the park in which it resides. It measures how closely each of a park's assets is aligned to these missions. Determining this score helps parks decide which assets should be retained and at what level they should be maintained. Considering that the API measures an asset's degree of alignment to the NPS mission, if parks inflate APIs they are actually working against the NPS mission. Park Planning documents should be used to provide reference for rating assets. Recommended documents include:

- Park Enabling Legislation
- List of Classified Structures (LCS)
- Cultural Landscape Report
- General Management Plans (GMP)
- Federal Real Property (FRP)
- Concession and Leasing Contracts
- Natural Resource Plans
- Visitation Statistics
- Foundation documents and Business Plans
- National Register Nomination

The API is, in is simplest form, a prioritization method for each park. When there is not enough time or resources to preserve or maintain everything, prioritizing ensure that those objects which are most valuable continue to exist while less valuable objects are let go. Since the API is a comparison of relative priorities within a park, it serves as a valuable park management tool.

Because API is a *park* management tool, determining the API score should be a joint management decision that involves all divisions in the park. Since there is no way to remove all subjectivity, the management team is responsible for setting consistent interpretations of the criteria in line with the definitions and using them throughout the rating of all assets. This should be done with the intent of aligning assets to the mission as consistently as possible and having a spread of priority within each asset type. Check lists and examples for each asset type have been avoided since there is no way we can identify all examples; rather, the API criteria have been developed to help parks make more analytical decisions based on local conditions and API examples.

Question 1a – Natural Resource Preservation

Fundamentally, the built (or constructed) assets in a park indirectly contribute to the preservation and protection of natural resource processes and systems from degradation by guiding appropriate public enjoyment of the resource. However, most assets, whether buildings, utility systems, developed campgrounds, or roads and parking areas, will receive a natural resource preservation score of None, because most assets do not have a *direct* positive impact on a natural resource.

For those assets that do have a positive impact on natural resource preservation, such as boardwalks, the most important distinction between Low, Medium, and High is the type of natural resource which is protected. For example, assets which rate *Low* have a positive impact on natural resources which are not unique, endangered, or rare. Assets with a score of *Medium*, on the other hand, have a positive impact on state-listed protected species or rare natural resources. Finally, scores of *High* have a positive impact on Federal Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species or species identified in a park's enabling legislation.

None	*Definition*	The asset has no positive impact on a natural resource.
	Examples	- Most buildings. - Most utility systems. - Developed campgrounds. - Most roads and parking areas.
Low	*Definition*	The asset has minimal positive impact on a natural resource.
	Examples	- Sewage collection systems and or disposal systems (e.g., septic tanks and leach fields) that are not adjacent to surface water or wetlands. - Toilet facilities located where resources are not at risk of significant damage or pollution from human waste (e.g., not near surface water). - Roadside parking areas that prevent erosion and adverse impact to non-unique, endangered, or rare natural resources alongside the road. - Marinas that prevent erosion and adverse impact to non-unique, endangered, or rare natural resources alongside the shoreline. - Trails that prevent social trailing and the resulting adverse impact to non-unique, endangered, or rare natural resources. - Hazardous materials storage facilities. - Primitive campgrounds located in areas that minimize impact on non-unique, endangered, or rare natural resources. - Park roads or trail bridges over water courses or wetlands, without which the structures would suffer resource degradation. - Resource monitoring and measuring facilities (e.g., weather or air quality stations) and facilities/assets that support resource monitoring and measuring (e.g., utilities, roads, trails, etc.).

Medium	*Definition*	The asset is used for restoration of state listed species or rare natural resource. OR The asset has significant positive impact on at least one of the following: ○ State listed protected species. ○ Rare natural resources (that if degraded, would require extensive restoration and recovery efforts). ○ Natural resources identified in foundational documents (e.g., enabling legislation, GMP, RMP, etc.) whose protection is directly tied to the park mission.
	Examples	• Toilet facilities and sewage systems near surface water or other sensitive resource such as karst formations which could otherwise be contaminated by human waste. • Toilet facilities located near the entrance to a cave, which is home to a state endangered bat species, whose purpose is to reduce incidents of human waste deposition in the cave where it is extremely slow to biodegrade. • Hardened trails, boardwalks, or bridges over state protected or rare natural resources. • Wastewater collection or treatment systems where system failure or accidental discharge could enter surface water or sole source aquifer. • Trails, trail bridges, or primitive campgrounds that limit resource damage to state protected or rare natural resources.
High	*Definition*	The asset has significant positive impact on at least one of the following: ○ Federal Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species. ○ Species identified in Park's enabling legislation. ○ Other resources specifically identified in legislation (e.g., Wild and Scenic River).
	Examples	• Trails and boardwalks that carry visitors through a fragile ecosystem with minimal impacts on natural resources that are T&E species, identified in the park's enabling legislation, or identified in other legislation. • Wastewater collection or treatment systems where accidental discharge could enter a designated Wild and Scenic River. • Greenhouses used to propagate T&E species. • Protective enclosures for T&E species reintroduction. • Toilet facilities located near the entrance to a cave, cited in the park's enabling legislation, intended to reduce incidents of human waste deposition in the cave, where it is extremely slow to biodegrade. • Bearproof refuse transfer stations which are located in prime habitat for grizzly bears, where they are a listed T&E species. • Trails and trail bridges that limit access to T&E habitats.

Question 1b – Cultural Resource Preservation

By their nature, cultural resources generally are built or manmade assets that require some form of maintenance or attention to preserve it in perpetuity. This makes it more likely that cultural resources will often receive some type of low, medium, or high score in the Asset Priority Index. As with Natural Resource Preservation, the most important distinction between Low, Medium, and High is the type of cultural resource to be protected. Use the LCS and National Register Nominations for confirmation of National Register significance.

Although you should refer to the specific definition for each, in general:
- *Low* applies to an asset that is primarily of state or local significance, but is incompatible with the park's legislated significance
- *Medium* applies to an asset that is of state or local significance and compatible with the park's legislated significance.
- *High* applies to an asset that is a key component of a National Historic Landmark District or has been declared a National Historic Landmark itself.

None	Definition	The asset that has no relationship to cultural resource preservation and is FRP Historic Factor 6.
	Examples	• Non-historic assets with no cultural resource value.
Low	Definition	The asset meets at least one of the following criteria: ○ The asset does not meet the National Register criteria, but a decision has been reached through a park planning process to manage the asset as a cultural resource. ○ The asset has a state or local level of significance and meets the National Register criteria, but is incompatible with the park's legislated significance or with the park's management objectives for fundamental resources. ○ The asset has a state or local level of significance and meets the National Register criteria, but has no continuing use or potential use, based on its design or location. ○ The asset limits the impacts of visitor use on a cultural resource where impacts could cause limited degradation. ○ FRP Historic Factor 4 or 5.
	Examples	• State or locally significant backcountry comfort station that lacks a feasible water supply and therefore has no continuing or potential use. • Rock-edged trails/paved sidewalk that limit access through sensitive cultural landscapes. • State or locally significant lighthouse that is being inundated by sea level rise and therefore has no continuing or potential use.

Medium	*Definition*	The asset meets all of the following criteria: o The asset is of state or local significance and meets the National Register criteria individually or as a contributing feature of a site or district, and o The asset is compatible with the park's legislated significance, and o The asset has a continuing or potential use based on its design and location. OR The asset meets at least one of the following criteria: o The asset limits the impacts of visitor use on a cultural resource, where impacts could cause major degradation. o FRP Historic Factor 2 or 3.
	Examples	• Administrative structures and grounds of a Mission 66 historic district with state significance. • A homesteader's orchard with local significance which is compatible with the park's legislated significance and has continuing use. • An asset that limits the impact of visitor use on a cultural resource, such as a boardwalk across a fragile archeological site. • Tour road in a battlefield.
High	*Definition*	The asset meets at least one of the following criteria: o The asset's preservation is specifically legislated. o The asset is key to the park's legislated cultural significance. o The asset is nationally significant and meets the National Register criteria. o The asset has been declared a National Historic Landmark. o The asset is a contributing feature to a National Historic Landmark District or a nationally significant National Register site or district. o Asset is a fundamental resource specified in the park's foundation document or park plans. o The asset is a prehistoric asset. o The asset directly protects a cultural resource. o FRP Historic Factor 1.
	Examples	• The Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. • Historic National Cemetery. • Meridian Hill Park, a National Historic Landmark. • A historic building or structure that is nationally significant, such as the Old Court House, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, Chesapeake and Ohio Canal System. • The Baggage Building within Ellis Island Historic District. • A prehistoric ruin or structure, such as a cliff dwelling, earth lodge or temple mound. • An asset that directly protects cultural resources, such as a stand-alone museum collections storage building. • A preservation structure over or surrounding a nationally significant cultural resource.

		• Railroad turn table that is a fundamental resource identified in park plan.
		• Historic Locomotive/Ship.

Question 2 – Visitor Use

This criterion takes into account the NPS's responsibility to its visitors, it examines whether an asset contributes to visitor accessibility, understanding, and enjoyment as measured by the potential number of visitors who may use the asset.

Ratings for visitor use are based on the estimated number of annual visitors using a particular asset, identified as a percentage of annual visitation or by locality type and therefore its potential for visitor use. This is an imprecise measure as few parks have accurate counts of visitor use by asset, and it can be misused. Recall however, that the purpose of the API criteria is to allow the park management team to determine which assets, in a budget constrained situation, are more important for operations and maintenance. Assets that support visitor use areas such as electrical system or wastewater should be considered to have the same visitor use as the assets they support.

- None: 0%, not accessible to the visitor
- Low: < 39% of annual visitation
- Medium: 40 – 74% of annual visitation
- High: 75 – 100% of annual visitation

Since this approach of estimated percent of annual visitors using an asset relies on perception, it may be beneficial to think of assets and the location they are in. For example, a large park with concession operations and visitor centers in one area may think that all assets in this area are estimated as high; however it is not always the case. Visitor utilization is the focus of this criterion.

None	Definition	The asset is not expected to be used by park visitors.
	Examples	• Service roads to maintenance facilities. • Any facilities behind locked gates or signed to keep visitors out. • Employee housing areas.
Low	Definition	The asset meets at least one of the following criteria: o The asset is used by approximately 1-39% of a park's annual visitors. o Asset is located in an area that accommodates drive experiences along roads (usually unpaved) that provide a sense of being in a remote area. o Asset is located in a more primitive area that requires visitors to exert relatively high levels of time and energy to access them (fewer "customer touch points"). o Asset not in high-use area that delivers orientation, safety, or regulatory information about the park, or houses maintenance functions that improve the visitor experience
	Examples	• Remote areas, paved or unpaved roads, parking areas, and trails. • Primitive toilets and campsites in the backcountry. • Backcountry offices, visitor contact stations, or ranger cabins that offer limited services to visitors. • Marina for permanent docking.
Medium	Definition	The asset meets at least one of the following criteria: o The asset is used by approximately 40-74% of a park's annual visitors. o Asset is in an area with major development but focus is on visitor experience along a road, usually paved, or allows visitors to travel between major development areas. o Asset is near developed areas, and/or is located in a natural or cultural landscape area that allows visitors to feel distant from assets that provide comfort and convenience. o Asset is part of infrastructure that supports the visitors' experience and enjoyment in developed or visitor use areas.
	Examples	• Likely secondary trails, secondary roads, and parking areas. • Small groupings of campsites/picnic areas used by approximately 40-74% of annual visitors to the park. • Water and wastewater systems in a day-use-only visitor use areas with approximately 40-74% annual visitation. • Alternative energy, telecommunication (phone/radio/IT) or other utility systems that support approximately 40-74% visitor use. • Multi-use marina for day use sailing and permanent docking. • Structure for overnight visitor use in a cabin camp. • Landscape for First Amendment activities. • Canal, trolley, or railroad transit system. • The fishing pier at Gateway National Recreation Area.

High	*Definition*	The asset meets at least one of the following criteria: ○ The asset is used by approximately 75-100% of a park's annual visitors. ○ Asset directly supports or is utilized by visitors located within a major visitor servicing area. ○ Asset is located in a natural and/or cultural area with many people, where visitors can see, smell, and touch park resources.
	Examples	• Visitor centers, contact stations, comfort stations, lodges, stores, and restaurants in high visitation areas. • Roads, parking areas, trails, and boardwalks providing access to primary points of interest. • Highway assets in a Parkway. • Presidential houses in National Historic Parks. • Education centers, amphitheaters, and museums with visitations at approximately 75% and above of Park's annual visitors. • Water and wastewater systems in major day use and overnight visitor servicing areas. • Athletic fields/playgrounds for public use in an urban park. • Canal, trolley, or railroad system that provides an interpretive experience. • Maintained beach with high visitor use.

Question 3 – Park Support

Park Support ratings are based on the degree to which an asset supports employees, both in doing their jobs and in providing benefits to them. Therefore, in general: *Low* applies to an asset that plays only a minor role in park operations. *Medium* applies to an asset that is not "required" but is important for the effectiveness of park, concessions operations, or park partners. *High* applies to an asset that is used year-round by park employees, concessioners, or park partners in the support of their duties.

NOTE: "Operations" here is referring to park functions, and not to the work type Facility Operations (FO).

None	*Definition*	The asset has no function of providing support to park operations, employees, concessionaires, or park partners.
	Examples	- A historic asset without adaptive use (not used as housing or offices). - A ruin/maintained archeological site. - Assets used as interpretive displays. - Park housing units that are not identified in the park Housing Management Plan.
Low	*Definition*	The asset meets at least one of the following criteria: ○ The asset plays only a minor role in park operations. ○ The asset is specifically designed to promote recreation and welfare to park employees, concessioners, or park partners.
	Examples	- Storage buildings whose use is incidental to a concession or park partner's core operations. - Service roads that are used seasonally or infrequently by park employees, concessionaires, or park partners. - Maintained landscapes around housing areas and administrative buildings. - Storage facilities. - Exercise trails in and around worker concentrated areas that enhance the employees' well-being. - Maintained landscapes such as playgrounds or sports fields used by park employees, concessionaires, or park partners. - Concession run store or restaurant.

Medium	*Definition*	The asset meets at least one of the following criteria: ○ The asset is not "required" but is important for the effectiveness of park, concessions operations, or park partners. ○ The asset is "Permitted" Housing as identified in the park Housing Management Plan. ○ The asset is used less than full-time by employees, concessionaires, or park partners in the support of their duties.
	Examples	• Service roads and parking areas that connect operational assets (e.g., administrative buildings, maintenance buildings, housing). • Administrative roads, parking areas, and trails that support park operations and/or support Search and Rescue (SAR) operations. • Fee collection stations at campgrounds and marinas. • Housing supporting environmental education programs, resource programs, or short term projects where the program would not be feasible without housing. • "Permitted" park housing. • Back country ranger stations (if not "required" housing and open seasonally). • Provided facilities specifically used for organized coursework intended to improve the skills and abilities of the staff (e.g., park training facilities).
High	*Definition*	The asset meets at least one of the following criteria: ○ The asset is used year-round by park employees, concessionaires, or park partners in the support of their duties. ○ The asset provides required housing. ○ The asset directly supports park safety, security, or emergency responses. ○ The asset is a primary fee collection source for a park unit. ○ The asset provides for the education of park employee, concessioner, or park partners' children and/or is a child care facility.
	Examples	• Roads that are identified in the park's Emergency Response Plan. • All utilities that service multiple locations (e.g., electrical, water, waste water treatment, phone, radio, IT). • Administrative offices, operational offices, maintenance shops, sign shops, equipment repair shops, vehicle fuel stations, and motor vehicle servicing shops. • Required housing identified in the park's Housing Management Plan or housing that is required by contract or agreement. • Medical facilities, including laboratories. • Emergency Operations assets such as fire brigades, ranger stations, holding facilities, and heliports. • Schools and child care buildings for children of park employees, concessionaires, or park partners. • Fee collection booths that are a primary entry contact point.

Question 4 – Asset Substitutability

The final consideration when establishing an API for an asset is the impact on the park and its mission if the asset were no longer available. This measure, called substitutability, considers the uniqueness of the asset's purpose or the impact if the asset were lost or destroyed. Note that purpose is the key metric when determining substitutability, rather than the uniqueness of the object itself. This is an important difference because unique assets, while important, may house purposes that can be relocated or may be better housed in another asset.

Substitute has "Low/No Impact"	*Definition*	An alternative asset exists to fulfill the requirement or purpose of this asset, and the impact or cost of that "substitute", in terms of the core mission – resource preservation, visitor experience, and/or park support – is low or virtually none. For example, the distance to the alternative asset is feasible (minor), or a change in process or technology, from prior park standards, has no or a manageable cost.
	Examples	- Campgrounds inside a park where alternatives are a relatively short distance away within or outside park boundaries. - Comfort stations where alternative buildings are only a short distance away. - Employee training centers where training spaces (e.g. hotels or conference centers) are available at minimal cost and in close proximity to park boundaries. - Readily available housing in the local community for park employees, concessioners, or park partners to rent or purchase. - Roads, parking areas and trails giving access to the above examples.
Substitute has "High Impact"	*Definition*	An alternative asset exists to fulfill the requirement or purpose of this asset, but the *negative* impact of that "substitute", in terms of the core mission – resource preservation, visitor experience, and/or park support – is high. For example, the distance to alternative asset is too great or the alternative route is not feasible (road), or a change in process or technology, from prior park standards, is not cost effective.
	Examples	- Campgrounds, picnic areas, or playing fields in a park where alternatives are within or outside park boundaries, but they are such a large distance away as to be infeasible for visitors. - Alternative buildings (e.g., visitor center, comfort station, ranger station) exist but are not within a reasonable distance to be a feasible alternative for visitors. - Alternative housing exists but it is not affordable for staff or requires too great a distance for commuting. - Cultural landscapes found in a limited number of public or non-profit units in the nation. - Either of two trails that provide access to a significant locality. - Roads and parking areas giving access to a non-significant locality as described in above examples.

"No" Substitute	*Definition*	The asset is truly unique – no suitable "substitutes" exist for the functional requirement or purpose of this asset; this includes assets specifically identified as part of the park enabling legislation.
	Examples	• The only entrance road into a park unit. • Roads that provide the only access to significant localities. • Trails that provide the only access to significant localities. • Campgrounds in a park where no other campgrounds exists within or outside park boundaries. • Utilities (single point of failure). • Housing for a remote park where no other housing exists outside park boundaries. • Monuments, memorials, ruins, or unique cultural landscapes specifically named in a park's enabling legislation, such as the Washington Monument.