



GreenPath® Environmental Initiative



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Delaware North Companies Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc.
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1. Overview

When Delaware North Companies Parks & Resorts, Inc. (Parks & Resorts) became Yosemite National Park's official concessioner in 1993, the company embraced its stewardship responsibility by developing an Environmental Management System (EMS) entitled GreenPath®. In 2001, subsidiary DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc. became the first hospitality business in the United States to have its EMS certified under the prestigious International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 14001 program for environmental management.

Fundamentally, ISO 14001 defines what each organization does to minimize harmful effects on the environment caused by its activities. The standards are driven by compliance with environmental laws and management programs designed to mitigate environmental impacts.

Although the GreenPath® program can be found at all Parks & Resorts facilities, each property is encouraged to mold the program to best fit the area's unique operations.

What Is GreenPath®?

GreenPath® is DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc.'s award-winning EMS. It has written policies and procedures designed to protect Yosemite National Park's natural environment during the course of the company's normal business practices, many of which were designed to prevent pollution and comply with environmental laws. DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc. has an official GreenPath® manual and logo, the latter of which is prominently displayed throughout Yosemite so that guests and associates can identify areas where programs and policies have been effectuated.

The primary motive for developing an EMS was the combination of existing environmental programs and initiatives under one umbrella to track progress results while meeting consumer expectations for a concessioner operating in a national park, and placing the company ahead of its competitors. ISO 14001 requires the EMS to be audited annually by a third party. This process not only validates the EMS, but, also establishes environmental precedents for excellence.

The initial concept for the GreenPath® initiative was developed by the President of Parks and Resorts. He held a meeting with the Director of Sustainability and company environmental managers in Yosemite to discuss the idea of developing an EMS that would meet the goals of Parks & Resorts' parent, Delaware North Companies, on a global level. The GreenPath® environmental initiative in Yosemite laid the groundwork for future cloning of the program throughout the Parks & Resorts' portfolio of properties.

2. Program Establishment

In 1999, DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc. began the development of GreenPath® with the assistance of ERM of Sacramento, California. This is the EMS which is still in place today. An oversight group was formed, comprised of managers from every concessions department in Yosemite. This group was labeled the Green Team, and was lead by the chief operating officer. During the initial research period, the Green Team reviewed several prominent environmental certifications, including Green Seal, Green Cross and ISO, the latter of which was chosen due to its parallel attributes with the concession's core hospitality practices.

A small group, made up of Green Team members, was then organized and lead by the compliance and communications manager, who conducted in-depth studies of the ISO policies and procedures and drafted the GreenPath® manual based on ISO policies, procedures, and both federal and state regulations.

The first step in the ISO procedure was to list all of the concession operations in Yosemite, then evaluate what effects they have on the environment. The next step was to rate those effects according to their impact, an exercise known in ISO vernacular as "developing significant environmental aspects." ISO requires an annual repetition of this exercise to ensure the concession's business model is compliant with ISO environmental standards, while making new strides to improve the status quo.

Environmental stewardship has always been a hallmark of Delaware North Companies' reputation. However, back in 1993, when the company won the contract to operate the concession in Yosemite National Park, it became a fundamental operating principle. GreenPath® covers every aspect of true environmental stewardship. In fact, the company's environmental program is so strong that it has served as a platform for receiving ISO 14001 registration - a first for a U.S. hospitality company.

In Yosemite, the EMS continues to be executed and managed by the Green Team, which is still represented by each operating department throughout the Park. The director of hotels was appointed as the first environmental manager and led the Green Team for its first four years. Then the resource manager assumed the responsibilities of the environmental manager in 2005.

The Green Team is divided into subcommittees that represent each of the significant environmental aspects: water and energy use, waste production, material use, air emissions, and wildlife impact. The Green Team meets monthly to plan initiatives, discuss environmental issues and report any progress the subcommittees have made regarding their environmental management plans.

3. Goals and Benchmarking

The goals of GreenPath® are outlined in Delaware North Companies' Corporate Policy and mandate the incorporation of environmental considerations into all concessions business decisions, including planning and design activities.

1. Set measurable objectives and targets to improve environmental performance.
2. Where practical, reduce pollution and the generation, discharge and emission of waste to all environmental media: air, land, surface water, and groundwater.
3. Anticipate emerging environmental issues and develop response programs.
4. Allocate and maintain resources for the effective implementation of environmental management and compliance programs.
5. Encourage communication among employees, Park patrons, neighbors, surrounding communities, business associates, customers, regulatory agencies, and all other publics regarding Parks & Resorts' environmental footprint.
6. Parks & Resorts will strive to make a positive environmental contribution to the communities in which they operate.

Environmental Management Plans (EMPs) are developed to track significant environmental aspects of the GreenPath® initiative. These EMPs have clear, written objectives, targets with completion dates, and are measured through a third-party auditor, and through comprehensive internal audits.

The success of the GreenPath® program is measured in two different ways. The first measurement is based on the results of the audits. To date, Parks & Resorts have passed every audit since its EMS was registered with ISO 14001.

The second measurement is based on Parks & Resorts' contributions to improving and protecting the environment.

For example, Parks & Resorts completed a two-week ecological restoration project in 2008 at the Tuolumne Meadows High Sierra Camp using volunteers from its own staff, members of the Yosemite Association, and with assistance from the National Park Service (NPS). This restoration was just one of multiple such efforts at all seven of the High Sierra Camps throughout Yosemite's back country wilderness. Parks & Resorts also added 30 bicycles to its Used Bike Program, which refurbishes bicycles that would normally be discarded and distributes them to staff members. This program encourages riding a bicycle over driving a vehicle, thus raising awareness regarding fossil fuel consumption and global warming.

These programs provide Parks & Resorts with opportunities to work with other Park Partners, such as the Yosemite Association and the National Park Service, to help protect Yosemite's resources in collaborative fashion. The compliance work that must be completed before starting any project inside a national park can be challenging when considering historic buildings and archeological sites.

DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc. has used the success of the GreenPath® program goals to the benefit of both parent Delaware North Companies and all of its publics through outreach to both print and broadcast media. DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite's public relations department has communicated with travel writers and network television/radio affiliates alike, who have reported favorably on the completion of restoration projects and recycling efforts in Yosemite, thus validating the concessioner's commitment to environmental stewardship within the Park. The results of these outreach efforts favorably influence the variety of publics that have both business and vacation travel relationships with all of the Park Partners.

4. Outcomes and Environmental Benefits

Through GreenPath® recycling efforts, DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc. has reduced its impact on the Yosemite environment by mitigating the amount of waste transferred to the local landfill: over 1600 tons in 2007 alone. The NPS also reduced air emissions from the fleet of Yosemite Valley shuttle buses by replacing them with hybrid models in 2005. These hybrids emit up to 90% fewer emissions than conventional diesel buses. To further this transportation concept, all of the diesel tour tram cabs will be replaced with a hybrid fleet in the spring of 2009.

Plastic food ware, such as disposable plates and eating utensils, are being replaced at all Yosemite food and beverage locations throughout the park with biodegradable food ware (PLA, which stands for polylactide, a clear, plastic-looking polymer made from biodegradable corn). Full replacement of the food ware is expected by 2009, and is the first step to eliminating plastic ware while composting up to 30% of organic waste.

In 2008, Parks & Resorts received two awards for its waste reduction program. The National Park Service recognized the program as one of the best within the national park system by awarding DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc. with

the NPS Environmental Achievement Award. That award was escalated the NPS through their submission to the Department of Interior (DOI) for their environmental achievement award, which achieved an honorable mention.

Other achievements garnered by DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc. were the 2002 environmental award presented by the Travel Industry Association (TIA), who cited registration of GreenPath® to the ISO 14001 standard as the determining factor, and the Wrap Award from the California Integrated Waste Board, who also recognized the program through its award in consecutive years from 1993 through 2008.

In 2003, the Sierra Business Council presented its Vision 2020 Award to DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc., recognizing innovation and leadership within the Sierra Nevada mountain region through the implementation of the GreenPath® program. In 2004, the American Hospitality & Lodging Association's Enviro-management Award recognized the Yosemite concessioner as a lodging property that has developed a culture toward integrating environmental management practices which improve everyday operations and revenue stream while maintaining quality service and meeting guest expectations. Then in 2006, DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc. received the prestigious IMEX Award, which is an international recognition for hosting green meetings.

The basic approach Parks & Resorts has taken in its quest for continuous environmental improvement has not changed, although some goals have been adjusted to coincide with modifications to NPS policies and financial considerations. E-survey results from Park patrons consistently validate the success of the program components with praise for the concessioner's efforts. For instance, guests routinely visit the Yosemite recycling center to redeem a variety of glass and aluminum containers, and they voluntarily re-use hotel towels on consecutive days to conserve water. And those surveys often contain suggestions to further the GreenPath® initiative, thus confirming consumer interest in the welfare of Yosemite's natural environment. For the record, the GreenPath® environmental initiative, while proprietary under corporate standards, could easily be replicated by other organizations.

5. Relevance to Traveler or Travel Industry

DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc. believes the GreenPath® initiative has set precedents for environmental stewardship. Recognized as a global leader in hospitality, and first in its field for earning the ISO 14001 environmental designation for a hospitality company operating in a national park, the concessioner is committed to the protection of Yosemite's natural resources. That commitment is communicated via printed leaflets and signage that are viewed annually by 3.5 million domestic and international guests throughout Yosemite National Park. The materials are specifically designed to influence visitors so that they will incorporate the GreenPath® environmental standards into their day-to-day activities at home and at work, while sharing their newly-acquired knowledge with friends and peers.

6. Real-World Example

DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc.'s Green Team created messaging to contend with continuing problems of guests feeding animals and leaving exposed trash on outdoor dining tables throughout Yosemite. The concession's interpretive department created artwork of commonly viewed Park wildlife, which were painted on circular, hard plastic sheets with messaging in English, German and Spanish. The plastic was placed on all outdoor dining tables with the intent of educating all visiting guests regarding the perils of feeding wildlife.

Squirrels, raccoons, deer and numerous species of birds also feed on leftover dining table trash, which increases the likelihood they will become dependent on human food and then have problems attaining natural food sources in the wild. By taking a proactive stance and reaching out to Yosemite guests through GreenPath® messaging, DNC Parks & Resorts at Yosemite, Inc. was able to simultaneously save these animals and significantly reduce the creation of exposed trash.