

## Climate Change Media Plan for Shenandoah National Park

### Abstract:

Perhaps one of the most currently pertinent social issues we face today, both domestically and globally, is climate change. As scientists continue to study the changing climate, they are increasingly certain of the effects of human activity and are progressively more concerned about the future of our Earth if those actions do not change. The challenge, then, is to determine how to best educate the public about the issue and what they can change in their day-to-day habits to support a more environmentally sound lifestyle. The National Park Service has an unparalleled ability to reach people in an informal learning setting. Thus, Shenandoah National Park, as one of the largest parks on the east coast, has a great responsibility to draw climate change education into their visitors' displays. Carbon emissions also affect Shenandoah specifically in that they reduce the air quality and therefore visibility from Shenandoah's famous overlooks. This project is focused on developing a climate change media plan centered around a new display in their visitor center to educate the public about air quality, climate change and reducing their carbon footprints. While the full display is still under development and is projected to be finished in early Spring 2013, this part of the project outlines the media plan for the project and includes a completed video that introduces air quality issues in the park.

### Aims and Audience:

This video series aims to better inform the public about what climate change is and how it is affecting Shenandoah National Park, one of the largest natural resource parks in the country. Specifically, it aims to make the science behind climate change more accessible to a wide range of audiences and to personalize the issue by explaining how it will impact the beloved national park.

Because this series will be developed for use both in visitor centers and as an online resource for teachers and students, the audience will be very diverse. Based on studies done within the park, the demographics of visitors to Shenandoah National Park include a wide range of age, gender and socio-economic background. Additionally, this project aims to create an online resource for students between the ages of 11 and 14 (roughly 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade). As such, the material must be presented in such a way that it is easily understandable and accessible to a large variety of citizens.

### Project details:

**Video #1: Introduction to Climate Change Science** (Tentative Length: 3 minutes)

This video will provide the basis and context for the following two videos. It will introduce the audience to our scientific understanding of the changing climate and will define the greenhouse gas effect and how we know modern climate change is the result of human-caused greenhouse gas production instead of a process of the natural world. Additionally, it will expand on what matters scientists are certain of and where the gaps in climate change science are. It will be consistent with the NPS stance on climate change—it will objectively explain what science is telling us about our changing world and not comment politically or otherwise.

### **Video #2: Degrading Air Quality in Shenandoah** (Tentative Length: 3 minutes)

This video provides a more in-depth look at the air quality issues the park faces. Because park visitation to Shenandoah is centered largely on their numerous overlooks that present beautiful views of the surrounding mountains, air quality is an especially pertinent issue in this park. Shenandoah is located in close proximity to and downwind from major industrial and urban areas, and monitoring projects within the park have confirmed that human-caused air pollution has impaired air quality and visibility and has significantly degraded the distance color and contrast of views throughout the park.<sup>1</sup> Beauty aside, degradation of air quality also has serious impacts on our health and the health of many species that fill important roles in our ecosystems and environment. The goal of this video is to give visitors a reason to care and more information about what they can do. (See included video)

### **Video #3: How to Reduce Your Carbon Footprint** (Tentative Length: 1.5 minutes)

The final video of this series will address what visitors can do to reduce their carbon footprint. Ideally, the first two videos on climate change and air quality will inform the audience about the issues and give them a personal reason to care. This video will give them the resources and information they need to make a difference in their daily lives. This video will be shorter than the first two because it will be accompanied by interactive activities that give the audience a chance to actively participate in the display.

### **Supplementary Material**

In addition to creating the three videos described above, this project will also have an interactive portion to better engage the audience. Attached to each of the videos will be some interactive activity related to that video's main topic that will supplement and reinforce its learning objectives. Brainstorming and development of these ideas will take place concurrently with production of the videos.

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<sup>1</sup> "Air Quality - Shenandoah National Park", n.d., <http://www.nps.gov/shen/naturescience/airquality.htm>.