

ADNRSS MONTHLY REPORT
FEBRUARY 1999

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

FIRE MANAGEMENT Secretary Babbitt sent a letter of endorsement and support to EPA Administrator Browner on January 11 regarding EPA's issuance of an "Interim Air Quality Policy on Wildland and Prescribed Fires" last year. Secretary Babbitt assured the Administrator that land managing bureaus in the Department of Interior will include smoke management components in fire prescriptions to minimize air pollutant emissions and mitigate air quality impacts. While acknowledging the need for increased use of fire managed for resource benefits, the Secretary emphasized the importance of protecting air quality and other environmental considerations as related to units of the national parks and wilderness systems under DOI jurisdiction.

AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES An interorganizational group called Partners for Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) has formed to develop a national strategy for the conservation of these organisms and their habitats. PARC will sponsor a by-invitation-only national workshop on June 2-4, 1999, in Atlanta. NPS likely will be invited to be represented by 4 to 6 people. The workshop will seek to develop a continent-wide conservation strategy for amphibians and reptiles that will be similar to the existing Partners in Flight program that coordinates conservation efforts for neotropical migratory birds.

FOIA AND SECTION 207 OF THE 1998 PARKS OMNIBUS BILL Section 207 of the National Parks Omnibus Bill of 1998 authorizes the Secretary to withhold from FOIA requests any sensitive information about certain types of park natural and cultural resources. The USGS-led Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team for the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem has received a FOIA request that it believes comes under the authority of Section 207. The US Forest Service has received a FOIA request regarding goshawk information for the Kaibab Plateau (including part of GRCA) that it believes comes under the authority of Section 207. The Associate Director is working with the SOL to draft needed Service guidance regarding when and how to apply Section 207.

INTER-REGIONAL WHITE-TAILED DEER MEETING Representatives from Midwest, Southeast, National Capital, and Northeast Regions, WASO ADNRSS staff, and the DOI Solicitors Office met in CUVA to discuss white-tailed deer research, a Servicewide Programmatic EIS for white-tailed deer management, and needs and directions for white-tailed deer management in the National Park System. Attendees recommended that NPS: reestablish the Inter-Regional White-tailed Deer Team; develop an NPS deer team to assist parks in applying statutory and policy guidance and scientific information to developing park management objectives, plans, environmental documents, and inventory, monitoring, research, and data management plans regarding

white-tailed deer and related issues; develop a white-tailed deer management "cookbook"; seek additional USGS/BRD and other funding for additional white-tailed deer research needs; develop ecological goals and objectives (ecological integrity) that are definable and measurable; and not prepare a Service-wide programmatic EIS for white-tailed deer management.

EXECUTIVE ORDER ON INVASIVE SPECIES On Feb. 3, President Clinton signed Executive Order 13112 on Invasive Species. This Order describes federal agency duties; establishes an Invasive Species Council to be chaired by the Secretaries of the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, and Commerce; directs the Secretary of the Interior to establish an Advisory Committee; and directs the Council to develop an Invasive Species Management Plan. Secretary Babbitt, Secretary of Agriculture Glickman, and Under Secretary of Commerce Baker announced the Executive Order at a press conference at the National Geographic Society, where NPS hosted a booth to provide information about invasive species and their impacts to NPS resources. For more information, contact Gary Johnston (202-208-5886).

20% FEE FUNDS APPROVED Eleven projects proposed by the Associate Director NRSS have been approved for funding with FY 1998, 20% fee funds. These projects, totaling \$2.9 million, will directly benefit activities in parks or provide technical assistance to parks. Project categories include: Yellowstone northern range research program review, exotic and native plant species, wetland mapping, disturbed lands restoration, threatened and endangered species, Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit and Urban Recreation Research Center project support, support to the Natural Resource Initiative, economic valuation of park resources methodology, technical assistance to parks for animal capture, and development of software for parks to process research and collecting permits. For more information, contact Gary Johnston (202-208-5886) or John Dennis (202-208-5193).

SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK AIR QUALITY ASSESSMENT Christi Gordon (SHEN) and John Karish (Philadelphia Support Office) convened a meeting of air quality and effects experts to "kick-off" a three-year NRPP project to prepare an integrated assessment of air issues at the park. A number of Air Resources Division staff attended the meeting in Reston, VA, to outline responsibilities for data integration for information on visibility, ozone, deposition and air-quality related values. The completed document will provide the basis for air resource management decisions at SHEN and will feed into the regional air initiative known as the Southern Appalachian Mountains Initiative.

MOJAVE MULLS DISPOSAL OF CYANIDE HEAP-LEACH MATERIAL Mojave National Preserve is evaluating a proposal for removal of cyanide heap-leach material from the Morning Star Mine site (an inactive open pit gold mine) by Marsulex Environmental Technologies Corporation for use in road construction. Heap material, likely containing elevated levels of cyanide and heavy metals, was sold to Marsulex last year by Vanderbilt Gold Corporation. The park has not yet received a comprehensive reclamation plan from Vanderbilt. The NPS may be exposed to CERCLA liability if it authorizes removal of hazardous mine waste knowing it will be placed back into the environment (on roads). Minerals and policy specialists advised Mojave staff to work with the Regional Hazmat Coordinator regarding CERCLA liability and the possibilities of issuing Vanderbilt a CERCLA Section 106 Order.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS/SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES

CHEVRON TO REMEDIATE ABANDONED SITE AT PADRE ISLAND Padre Island National Seashore has secured a long sought-after agreement with

Chevron U.S.A., for the company to remediate hydrocarbon contamination of soils at the company's abandoned natural gas and oil processing plant site in the park. Although closed and reclaimed in 1984, park staff documented a lack of vegetation reestablishment in two specific areas at the site. Chevron returned to conduct soil and groundwater sampling that confirmed hydrocarbon contamination. Padre Island's agreement with the Chevron calls for additional site characterization, to be followed by the company's preferred cleanup option utilizing bioremediation.

NNL PROGRAM UPDATE The 1998 Section 8 Report will soon be undergoing surnaming in preparation for transmittal to the Congress. NPS NNL Regional Coordinators will meet April 26-28 near Albuquerque, NM. The NNL designation moratorium will soon be lifted.

CUMBERLAND GAP ROCK FALL HAZARDS ASSESSMENT Mining and cave specialists provided Cumberland Gap NHS staff with an assessment of rock mechanics problems at the park's Cudjo Caverns. Natural joints, fractures, and crack patterns of the rock at the entrance of the cave are prone to weathering and are safety concerns. The assessment addressed potential hazards from rock falls and recommended both short and long-term alternatives. Formalized monitoring, continued diligence in maintenance, and other recommendations have been offered for consideration by park management.

GEOLOGIC STUDY OF WESTERN PARKS RELEASED The USGS recently released the final report of the Morrison Formation Ecosystem Project. Experts hail the study as the most definitive information yet on the environment in which some of the most impressive dinosaurs ever discovered lived. The information provided in the report will potentially assist 15 park units in understanding and appropriately managing this unique geologic resource, and in developing informed interpretive programs.

HEADS UP

UNIFIED CALLS A call went out February 26 for Natural Resource Programs (internal and external programs funding). Also, a call for the National Science Foundation call for data will be sent to regions in early March.

PROGRESS

BIG BEND MINERAL THEFT Minerals specialists are coordinating an investigation into the fair market value of alleged stolen agate specimens from Big Bend NP. This is part of a three-year investigation aimed at eliminating theft of this unique natural resource from the Needle Peak area. Park samples of granular cryptocrystalline quartz and recently confiscated evidence were examined by resource specialists and determined to be a match. Investigators were supplied with an appraisal of the estimate of "fair market value" using two approaches. One encompassed a conventional comparable sales analysis, while the other used a court tested, but not widely accepted approach that enables a judge to impose a severe penalty for theft.

CUYAHOGA TO PLUG ORPHANED WELLS Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area and minerals specialists are developing contract specifications for plugging 10 orphaned oil and gas wells identified in the park.

Cuyahoga has committed \$50,000, with funds matched from the State of Ohio, to plug the wells. The plugging contract will be separate from surface reclamation leaving any cleanup of well-related pits to a later project. This year's project should plug ½ of the orphaned wells in the park.

NATURAL RESOURCE INTRANET RE-DESIGNED Visit the re-designed Natural Resource Intranet at <http://aqsun.aqd.nps.gov:82/index.htm>. On an interactive conference and meetings website, visitors can suggest additional natural resource conferences or meetings of interest to park staff. On an interactive reference desk, visitors can suggest links to natural resource publications, laws and regulations, and other helpful web and computer-related links. Another link gets you to the Intranet Yellowpages, a master list of all NPS Intranets. The website features items of current interest as well as listing natural resource technical contacts. Suggested improvements from the Intranet are welcomed.

AMPHIBIAN RESEARCH AND MONITORING Representatives from EPS, NPS, and USGS met in Duluth to plan a two-year, \$500K, effort to relate UV radiation to amphibian populations in a subset of PRIMENet parks. UV radiation distribution will be characterized along elevational gradients in six parks (GRSM, OLYM, SEKI, ACAD, ROMO, and GLAC). Two or three of these parks will get extensive pond-breeding amphibian surveys performed in an attempt to determine the status of populations that might be affected by UV. The intention is for this effort to be continued and expanded under the proposed \$8.1 million amphibian initiative for work on DOI lands.

NRPC DATA AND INFORMATION TEAM NEWS The NRPC Data and Information Team met in Denver on 24 February. The NRPC Personnel Directory and Natural Resource Expertise databases were presented and discussed. The group also reviewed NRPC-supported databases and discussed opportunities to coordinate development and potential integration of several systems. The Air Quality Information Management System (AQUIMS) was discussed as a possible common interface for several NRPC databases. An outline for a Natural Resource Information Management Handbook was discussed and will be further developed at the next meeting. In April, the team will review the initial integration of I&M.

PROFESSIONAL MEETING ATTENDANCE/PAPERS

GIS/INFORMATION SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP GIS developers from the Alaska Support Office, WASO Cultural Resources, and the Natural Resource Program Center met with an ESRI representative in Fort Collins. The developers demonstrated and discussed the Air Quality Information Management System (AQUIMS), the Alaska GIS data browser and tools, the Cultural Resources MAPIT GIS interface, the GIS data themes acquired by the I&M Program. Action items from the meeting include a proposal for NPS-wide acquisition of ESRI GIS products, adoption of AQUIMS as a standard interface for other applications, standardized products, and creation of a GIS data browser for the I&M Program.