

Subject: NRSS Monthly

Associate Director, Natural Resource Stewardship and Science
July 2002 Monthly Report

Good News/Bad News Department Natural Resource Stewardship and Science's Biological Resources Management Division bids a sad farewell to Biological Resources Management Division Chief Craig Axtell but is pleased to send him on his way as the new Superintendent of Bryce Canyon NP. Craig has the distinction of being the first leader of the division created as a result of the Natural Resource Challenge.

Social Science Surveys and Interviews: The Social Science Program has recently published a booklet entitled Social Science Surveys and Interviews in the National Parks and for the National Park Service: A Guide to NPS and OMB Approvals. The booklet is designed to orient park managers, partners, principal investigators, independent researchers and others to the various approval processes required regarding social science research in the National Park System. The booklet will be widely distributed to parks, regions, support offices and program centers in late July. For additional copies please contact Brian Forist in the Social Science Program office by telephone at (202) 208-6330 or via email at bforist@uidaho.edu.

Heads-Up Natural Resource Meeting at ESA/SER Meeting A general meeting of NPS natural resource personnel will be held on August 6 in Tucson in conjunction with the joint meeting of the Ecological Society of America and the Society for Ecological Restoration. Director's Awards for Natural Resources will be presented at a 6:30 p.m. reception. Principal topics at the 8:30-5:00 meeting include impairment guidance, natural resources coordination with the Fire Program, Natural Resource Program Center restoration activities, and RMP revisions and new software to replace the old RMP software. Updates of the Challenge and other activities will be available, as well as an open session with Associate Director Mike Soukup. Any NPSer in Tucson for the ESA/SER meeting (or other reason) is invited to come. The meeting is in the Copper Ballroom, InnSuites St. Mary's Hotel & Resort, 475 N. Granada. The reception and awards ceremony will be held at the poolside patio area of the Radisson City Center Hotel, 181 West Broadway Blvd.

Grant Received for Carbon 14 Dating: The National Park Foundation has provided a grant of \$850 to cover costs of carbon 14 dating on a fossil walrus skull found at Cape Hatteras National Seashore. A visitor discovered the skull in 1990 after it had been exposed by erosion. The skull was then examined by paleontologists at the Smithsonian Institute. It is a significant discovery because little evidence has been found of the walruses living so far south. It indicates a time when the coastal waters were much cooler. Recently, the skull was returned to Cape Hatteras where it will be put on display after more information is received from the carbon 14 dating.

This will be the first direct date from a record of a southern walrus. Stafford Research Laboratory in Boulder, Colorado is doing the analysis.

Coastal Mapping Meeting: Coastal Parks present a dilemma for the Geologic Resource Inventory because traditional geologic maps have limited value in providing geologic information to park managers. The unconsolidated, dynamic nature of shorelines is dramatically different from inland bedrock or surficial maps. To address this, Geologic Resources Division held a meeting in CANA to bring together coastal park staff, and USGS, state, and academic experts to identify what features in an east or gulf coast shoreline park could be mapped, how to map them, and who would map them. Park representatives from EVER, NER, SER, FOPU, CAHA, PAIS, ASIS, BISC, FIIS, TIMU, GUIS, and CANA were present. The USGS sent five people representing their Coastal and Marine Geology Group. The North Carolina Geologic Survey and Eastern Carolina University attended. There were representatives from five I&M networks, a CESU, IT, and NRPC attending. A preliminary report of mappable features has been generated and sent to participants for review. A final, comprehensive report will follow.

Release of Oil and Gas Operator's Handbook: The Geologic Resources Division has released the *Operator's Handbook for Nonfederal Oil and Gas Development in Units of the National Park System*. This handbook has been developed to assist oil and gas operators in understanding the NPS nonfederal oil and gas regulations and how to conduct oil and gas operations in NPS units while protecting park resources and values. The handbook provides an overview of the NPS regulations and permitting process, requirements to obtain a NPS permit to conduct oil and gas operations, and information on performance bonds, spill control plans and operator liability. The handbook is released as a "working draft" in hardcopy and CD-ROM formats and on the Geologic Resources Division's website for one year in order for oil and gas operators to evaluate and comment on its content. After a one-year period, the NPS will finalize the document and distribute it to oil and gas operators conducting operations in park units.

NRSS/NRPC On-line Directory: The NRSS/NRPC on-line directory, searchable by name, title, and Natural Resource Issues for which staff are contacts, can now be found at: <http://www1.nrintra.nps.gov/directory> . This remodeled directory also includes organization and program descriptions, including the Natural Resource Challenge, and bibliographic information and photographs of the employees. The directory may be reached through Inside NPS by following this path: InsideNPS>Programs>Natural Resource Stewardship and Science>Organization and Contacts>Natural Resource Stewardship and Science Directory. Designated staff in each Division are responsible for updates and changes.

Two Legal Settlements: Two law suits brought under the Park System Resource Protection Act (16 USC 19jj) were recently settled. One stemmed from a July 3, 1998 incident where an intoxicated operator ran his vessel aground on East Featherbed shoal in Biscayne National Park, injuring over 1800 square meters or almost ½ acre of seagrass habitat. In June of 2002, the operator settled with the park for \$225,000 in damages; the settlement will be used to reimburse the park for past response and assessment costs, to monitor the ongoing recovery of the original injury, and to compensate for the loss services by completing restoration at orphan seagrass grounding sites. The second settlement involved the rupture of a ten-inch liquefied petroleum

gas pipeline adjacent to U.S. Highway 191, approximately 400 feet from the Arches NP (Utah) boundary and less than one-half mile from the park visitor center. The resulting explosion and fire burned approximately 21 acres, including seven acres within the Park containing portions of five prehistoric and historic archeological sites and required the park to be closed to visitors, park staff, and residents for two days. A damages claim for restoration was settled in February of this year (for the full amount of the claim, \$63K). This was the second case involving injuries to cultural resources that has been successfully concluded by the National Park Service's Environmental Resources Damage Assessment and Restoration Branch, Environmental Quality Division.

Cape Hatteras National Seashore Issues Special Use Permit to U.S Army Corps of Engineers for Navigation Dredging: On June 17, 2002, the Wilmington NC District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers requested a special use permit from the NPS to dredge the navigation channel through Oregon Inlet. They also want to remove 400 feet of the Seashore's beach that is rapidly growing into the channel. Although the Corps has dredged Oregon Inlet for years and has previously requested a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service special use permit for disposal of the dredged material, this is the first time that the Corps has requested a NPS special use permit for dredging. The Corps completed an Environmental Assessment analyzing this year's proposed dredging in May 2002, with assistance from the NPS and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service as cooperating agencies. The Corps then issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) in June 2002. The NPS completed a Wetlands Statement of Findings and its own FONSI on the project and issued a one-year special use permit in early July 2002. The project is scheduled to begin in mid-August 2002. The collaborative nature of this effort could be a useful precedent for dredging projects involving NPS units and other Corps districts around the country.

Fisheries Management Plan/EIS: On July 16 and 17, EQD, Conservation Planning and Environmental Impact Analysis staff, met with North Cascades National Park Superintendent and staff to scope the High Mountain Lakes Fisheries Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement. The plan is in response to a consent decree and various agreements with the State of Washington and NPS regarding stocking of mountain lakes with non-native trout. The planning process is funded through EQD, and will involve extensive collaboration between Washington state agencies, USGS Biological Resource Division, EQD staff, and public interest groups.

Wyoming Air Quality Hearing: With support from Superintendents at BADL and WICA, ARD staff presented testimony at a hearing regarding Black Hills Corporation's (BHC) proposed coal-fired power plant in northeast Wyoming. ARD asked that Wyoming delay permitting the facility until BHC or the State performs an adequate analysis of impacts on the Parks. Preliminary modeling shows that there may be adverse visibility impacts at the parks from the proposed source and other sources in the area. ARD also asked that Wyoming require BHC to install better air pollution emission controls than those proposed, thereby reducing impacts at BADL and WICA.