

Subject: June Report

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

## **Natural Resource Challenge**

Learning Centers A meeting of Learning Center representatives was held in Estes Park, Colorado on June 4-5, 2002—the second gathering of its kind. It was hosted by Judy Visty and other Rocky Mountain National Park staff. Minutes of the meeting can be viewed at <http://im.den.nps.gov/resources.cfm> under “tools and reference documents”. About 60 people attended. The Natural Resource Information Division’s Information Services Branch will provide Washington Office support for learning centers, and is developing a web clearinghouse. Lynn Murdock, NRID staff in Washington (stationed with Interpretation and Education), will serve as the primary point of contact, but most of the branch will be involved with the centers in one fashion or another.

Challenge Council Members of the Natural Resource Challenge Council met in Gatlinburg, TN in conjunction with a meeting on All Taxa Biologic Inventories. The Council discussed needed short-term actions related to promulgating information—internally and externally—about results of NRC funding, as well as follow-up needed subsequent to final year funding. The Council will be meeting again in October.

## **Accomplishments/New Developments**

Joint DOI-USDA-State Chronic Wasting Disease Task Force: In May 2002, an effort to address chronic wasting disease (CWD) issues was initiated among DOI, USDA, and state wildlife management and agriculture agencies. This Federal-State cooperative CWD Task Force was

formed to identify actions that could be used in prevention and management of the disease and to increase public awareness of CWD. Deputy Director Randy Jones, with support from Biological Resource Management Division (BRMD) staff, represents NPS on this Task Force. The Task Force assigned five subgroups to address specific aspects of CWD management (Communications, Diagnostics, Disease Management, Research, and Surveillance) and to prepare a report to be presented to Congress in late June. BRMD staff were actively involved in preparation of this report, serving as co-chair of the Disease Management subgroup and participating in other subgroups.

ATBI The All-Taxa Biologic Inventory started at Great Smoky Mountains, in partnership a foundation. The ATBI has attracted enormous volunteer interest in what has become a significant citizen science effort. A meeting was held in Gatlinburg, TN in June to discuss expanding the ATBI to other parks, such as Point Reyes NS. The All Species Foundation is interested in the NPS effort since it exemplifies the kinds of efforts they hope to encourage globally. Their goal is identification of all extant species in the next 25 years. The National Park Foundation is also interested in encouraging the spread of ATBIs to other parks. The recent meeting was held at the same time that members of the Lepidoptera Society held a moth blitz and meeting participants got to see the results of that effort, which resulted in about 50 species new to science. The meeting resulted in a list of action items needed, such as further work on curatorial issues, and a framework for proceeding with our partners.

Water Rights Action taken on behalf of Chickasaw NRA: On June 21, 2002, the NPS filed a letter of protest with the Oklahoma Water Resources Board asking the Board to deny two ground water withdrawal permit applications in the vicinity of Chickasaw NRA. PESA, LLC, a private company, is proposing to orchestrate the sale of ground water from private landowners to a group of communities in Canadian County, in central Oklahoma (western suburbs of Oklahoma City). The location of the proposed withdrawal is up gradient from park springs and streams and the Lake of the Arbuckles reservoir, according to published USGS reports. NPS is concerned about the potential effects of the proposed withdrawal on water resources within Chickasaw NRA.

NEPA Project Underway: A RFP has been issued and two proposals received for the NPS E-NEPA project. This project will provide means for the public to access NEPA documents on public review, and for the NPS to receive and analyze electronic comments from the public. In addition, a project planning and coordination module will be developed as part of the project to better coordinate in park "compliance" activities with park projects.

Court Decision on Visibility: The D.C. Circuit recently vacated and remanded a key part of the Regional Haze Rule, which was enacted to reduce visibility impairment in many national parks. The Court struck down the process by which states determine which older facilities need strict pollution controls. (*American Corn Growers Assoc. v. EPA*, No. 99-1348, (D.C. Cir., May 24, 2002)). Although the national goal of attaining "natural" visibility within 60 years and the requirement that states make "reasonable progress" towards this goal were upheld, the decision has implications for our efforts to address visibility impairment in the parks. EPA is currently reviewing response options.

## Heads Up

NPS Recruiting a Director for the National Cave and Karst Institute- This new position in the Geologic Resources Division will be duty-stationed in Carlsbad, New Mexico. We are looking for an excellent program administrator and partnership developer who will build on the interim director's efforts over the past two years. The Institute is an exciting new venture, directed by Congress to be administered jointly by NPS and a non-federal entity. NPS is working with the City of Carlsbad, New Mexico Tech, New Mexico State University, and other federal agencies and non-governmental organizations to establish partnership agreements. The Institute will be international in scope and will focus on research facilitation and education related to cave and karst resources, protection and management. The GS-14/15 vacancy announcement, available on the USAJOBS website, is open to all applicants through July 12, 2002.

Director's Order #14 and Handbook: DO #14 and the Guidance Handbook for the Damage Assessment program have been posted for the 60-day field review and public comment. To see these documents, go to the NPS website and click on Information Zone and then click on Policy, Guidance, and Manuals. The review period closes on August 2. If necessary, a limited number of hard copies of the manual and/or a CD are available on request through either Dan Hamson at (202) 208-7504 or Rick Dawson at (404) 331-2629.

Ozone Health Advisory Program: Three years ago, guidelines were established for a NPS ozone health advisory program. Mike Soukup distributed these guidelines to the field in order to help parks establish internal procedures to deal with unhealthy (to both employees and visitors) air quality conditions. These guidelines were based on observed ozone concentrations in or near a park. However, EPA, National Weather Service, and local media are now better able to predict future ozone conditions. As a result, the Air Resources Division will be analyzing the capabilities of parks actively participating in an ozone advisory program to use local predicted ozone conditions to issue ozone health advisories in their parks.

NR-MAP Preparations are being made to update the NR-MAP workload evaluations, last updated shortly after the Service's mid-1990s reorganization. A memorandum issued in June requested that regional coordinators be named to assist with this process, which will be ongoing from October through mid-December. The regional coordinators will meet in early October (a change from the September date announced in the memorandum). Regions will distribute hard copy profiles to parks. Parks will have until mid-November to complete the profiles, and then regions will verify the profile information by mid-December.

Impairment Guidance By the end of July, draft impairment guidance should be going out for INTERNAL review to NRAG and to members of the impairment task force.

## **Progress/Other Significant Activities**

ATBI The All-Taxa Biodiversity Inventory started at Great Smoky Mountains, in partnership a foundation. The ATBI has attracted enormous volunteer interest in what has become a

significant citizen science effort. A meeting was held in Gatlinburg, TN in June to discuss expanding the ATBI to other parks, such as Point Reyes NS. The All Species Foundation is interested in the NPS effort since it exemplifies the kinds of efforts they hope to encourage globally. Their goal is identification of all extant species in the next 25 years. The National Park Foundation is also interested in encouraging the spread of ATBIs to other parks. The recent meeting was held at the same time that members of the Lepidoptera Society held a moth blitz and meeting participants got to see the results of that effort, which resulted in about 50 species new to science. The meeting resulted in a list of action items needed, such as further work on curatorial issues, and a framework for proceeding with our partners.

#### Senator Frist and EPA Administrator Whitman Visit Great Smoky Mountains -- EPA

Administrator Christie Whitman and Senator Bill Frist (TN) visited Great Smoky Mountains NP July 1 to learn more about some of the issues facing the Smokies. This was the first time an EPA Administrator has ever visited the Smokies. Keith Langdon spoke on the Park's All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory, Kris Johnson gave a presentation on exotic species affecting the Park, and Jim Renfro discussed air quality issues and the park's monitoring program. The group rode in a clean compressed natural gas bus from Sugarlands Visitor Center to Clingmans Dome where they hiked up to the observation tower and air quality station to learn more about the air pollution issues facing the Park. Clingmans Dome air quality station is the highest air monitoring station in eastern North America. Park Air Quality Specialist Jim Renfro gave a presentation on the status of the air quality in the Park. Administrator Whitman used the opportunity to announce the President Clear Skies Initiative that will require existing power plants to reduce air pollution (sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, and mercury) by an average of 70 percent. Significant improvements in air quality should be gained from this initiative. (from Jim Renfro/GRSM)

Mining Claim Validity Update – BLM and NPS staff are taking steps to renew the Interagency Agreement for a period of 5 years to cover mining claim validity work in NPS units. This primarily affects ongoing work in Denali and Mojave, which includes fieldwork for current examinations and defense of previous reports under contest before the Office of Hearings and Appeals. Recent work by the Geologic Resources Division staff on 15 Gold King placer gold claims in Denali has been terminated due to a settlement reached with the trustees of the claimants' bankruptcy estate. Fieldwork this summer will entail a BLM/NPS cooperative mapping exercise involving 34 Liberty placer gold claims on Moose and Rainy Creeks in Denali, in preparation for validity fieldwork that will occur in the 2003 and 2004 field seasons.

Little Colorado River Water Rights: In a ruling from the bench, the Little Colorado River Decree Court indicated it will approve the *Joint Motion for Confirmation of Binding Effect* for five stipulations filed on behalf of the NPS units within the basin. The Navajo Nation had requested that the Court not approve the stipulations. The *Joint Motion* was filed by the NPS and Abitibi Consolidated Sales Corp., Arizona Public Service, the City of Flagstaff, Salt River Project, and Tucson Electric and Power Co. to resolve water rights issues in the LCR.

NPS holds Inventory and Monitoring of Invasive Plants Workshop: This workshop, co-sponsored by the Biological Resource Management and Natural Resource Information Divisions, was held in Fort Collins, Colorado on June 4-6, 2002. A selected group of NPS, other

Federal agencies, states, and academic experts with experience in park-based monitoring programs, protocol design, modeling, and/or the ecology of invasive plants attended the three-day workshop. The workshop attendees addressed the key reasons for monitoring; 1) prevention and early detection, 2) measure the effect of control programs on the target exotics, 3) measure the effect of control programs on recovery of the natural system impacted, and 4) determination of patterns and trends on a landscape and regional scale. The attendees developed a draft framework and guideline to serve as the foundation for the development of invasive plant monitoring protocols for each of the Inventory and Monitoring networks. This framework will be presented at the Inventory and Monitoring Vital Signs meeting in Denver in August 2002.

West Nile Virus Briefing on Capitol Hill: On June 14, 2002 Carol DiSalvo, of the Biological Resource Management Division, attended the first 2002 West Nile Virus (WNV) briefing on Capitol Hill. She presented a short update concerning the National Park Service approach to management of risks from WNV.

Annual Restoration Program Retreat: The Department of the Interior held its annual program retreat for the damage assessment and restoration program at NCTC the week of June 17th. Environmental Quality Division/ERDAR Work Group members and staff attended. During the retreat the annual departmental work plan was approved, the long-term strategic plan prepared and several major policy and guidance issues were addressed. These decision documents will now be sent to the Executive Board for their approval. EQD members were assigned to several task force groups who will work on major policy and/or guidance topics over this next year.

Central Americans Assist Park Flight at North Cascades: Three biologists from Central America participated in an international internship during June for the Park Flight Migratory Bird Program project at North Cascades. This technical exchange was coordinated through the NPS Office of International Affairs International Volunteer in Parks program. The interns assisted with a Cornell Citizen Science monitoring project, "Birds in Forested Landscapes," and a MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) station, helped to plan an exhibit about Neotropical migratory birds and gave a related presentation to Spanish-speaking families from Skagit County, learned about local land trust and restoration efforts, and did interviews with media and student videographers.

## **Professional Meeting Attendance**

American Mosquito Control Association (AMCA) Meeting: Carol DiSalvo, of the Biological Resource Management Division, at the request of the AMCA, presented a session on National Park Service policy and pest management to a group of AMCA members. The NPS policy fared well.

Air and Waste Management Association (AWMA) Annual Meeting: Air Resources Division accepted AWMA's offer of complimentary exhibit space at their annual meeting in Baltimore. ARD staff attended the meeting and distributed information regarding NPS's air resource management activities. Staff also participated in a panel discussion regarding the NPS visibility

protection program and recent developments with the regional haze rule (see related article regarding Court Decision on Visibility.)



Natural Resource Advisory Group Meeting  
May 21 & 22, 2002  
Camp Round Meadow Gymnasium, Catoctin Mountain Park, Thurmont, MD

Summary of Actions/Recommendations:

- There should be an I&M Advisory Committee, with members beyond the I&M coordinators, but the coordinators should handle operational issues. Dave Shaver and Skip Ladd will revise the proposed role and function statement to clarify roles, focusing on strategic issues for this group. Mike Soukup will solicit nominations from the regions. The hope is to complete this before the August I&M meeting.
- There should be a memo from the Director or a Deputy Director to all superintendents re Challenge accomplishments.
- There should be further work to flesh out two aspects of a natural resource career development program – one focusing on the entry-to-development level, and another focusing on the advanced-level program managers. Brian Kenner, Craig Axtell, Dave Shaver, and Dan Kimball volunteered to work with Kathy Jope on this. Dennis Vasquez should be asked to participate.
- If there are sufficient, high-quality NRPP and other natural resource project proposals submitted for FY 03, a firm fixed list of projects for FY 2004 will also be developed. If there are difficulties, WASO will have a conference call with the Regions to discuss the next step.
- In November 2002, the Servicewide comprehensive call will be for firm proposals for a FY 05 fixed list of new starts and tentative proposals for a FY 06 tentative list. This assumes a firm fixed list is in place for FY 2004.
- Instructions for natural resource project fund sources are too complicated and long. Regions that have developed abbreviated versions should send them to Abby Miller and members who wish to forward suggestions modifications and editing are encouraged to do so.
- If the proposed Cooperative Conservation Initiative is likely to be a one-year program, WASO should issue a call for very brief proposals, as soon as it's clear that some level of funding *will* be appropriated for this. If it's going to be longer-term, consider dividing the funding among Regions. A work group to further scope out options, design how the call will be issued, and develop a schedule, was named: Dan Kimball, Skip Ladd, Bob McIntosh, Gary Vequist, John Yancy, Kathy Jope.
- A core team should meet with consultant to further define the information needs assessment project and provide the results to NRAG prior to holding planned field workshops. WASO will request nominees for a work group—there was little response to a previous request on this topic. Kathy Jope did volunteer to participate.
- Chris Shaver is soliciting nominations of people who have expertise to review draft impairment guidance.
- There will be a follow-up email to NRAG, inviting nominees for a work group to clarify guidance on natural resource awards.
- A general DO-77.0 would not serve a useful purpose beyond Management Policies. There is a need to verify that existing and planned DOs address all of the specific needed programs.

Next Meeting – Week of October 21. Locations under consideration: Carlsbad, Minneapolis, Denver, Marsh-Billings.

I&M Steering Committee (Skip Ladd and Dave Shaver)

Skip and Dave S. drafted a role & function statement for a reconstituted I&M steering committee, to serve as an intermediary between NRAG and the I&M technical folks, to include a network coordinator, a USGS representative and a superintendent, and with *ad hoc* participation by NRPC representatives. Alternately, regional I&M coordinators have proposed that they form a committee and meet regularly, for the ability to move quickly when needed.

After considerable discussion, NRAG concluded that there is a need to have an advisory committee (to be called

I&M Advisory Committee) broader than the regional coordinators, yet able to give more attention than NRAG can. The recommended structure will result in a committee with more members involved on a day-to-day basis with I&M activities, and therefore a group which has less need for much of the meetings to be devoted to bringing people up-to-date. The committee would include, in addition to the seven regional coordinators, a mix of individuals representing network coordinators, resource managers, superintendents, and the BRD. Regional coordinators may meet more often as a group. There is a need to clarify the respective responsibilities and relationships of the two groups, though generally I&M coordinators would deal with strictly operational issues and the Advisory Committee could empower them as a subgroup to handle specific issues beyond those that are strictly operational. We expect that few issues, other than funding allocations, would need to be elevated from the Advisory Committee to NRAG.

The new advisory group should aim to meet twice per year, with more frequent meetings via conference call. Travel funding would be provided by I&M. The group's effectiveness should be evaluated after one year, and then every few years thereafter.

Action: Dave and Skip, working with Rich Gregory, will revise R&F to clarify roles, focusing on strategic issues for this group. Mike and Abby will solicit nominations from the regions.

### NR Challenge (Mike Soukup and Abby Miller)

A summary of the NRC budget is on the web. All of the remaining funding will be requested in FY04 ("Identified Future Increased Needs"). The expectation is that the Administration will support between \$20 M and \$32 M.

WASO has taken a first step to identify future needs (post-Challenge) in OFS, which include:

- Taxonomists/curators
- Network-based ecologists
- Research project funding
- Coral reef projects

NRAG members mentioned the following as their perception of gaps:

- Regional data managers
- Geologists and other physical scientists
- Paleontology

We need to be sure that we are fulfilling the charge of Discovery 2000. It will help solidify the gains of the Challenge if we ensure that what we understand is better understood, and more clearly beneficial, to others.

Note that for CESUs, FY03 is the last year of proposed increases (\$400K). For FY04, an additional \$1 M is proposed to "Involve Scientists with Parks." This could fund four additional CESUs and also provide additional funding for existing CESUs.

There is discussion about how to make the curatorial regulations more workable for universities. Legally, we need to retain ownership, though we *can* be clearer about our intent to not ask that they be returned to us. Some universities have been asking for funding to support the maintenance of NPS-owned collections. One solution being pursued is to issue an RFP to see who is most interested and will give us the best deal.

### NR Challenge Council (Doug Morris)

Doug indicated that the Council is no longer needed for what it was originally intended, but feels the big issue that we're facing now is accountability – that superintendents spend Challenge funding on what it was intended for.

WASO has completed a report to Congress on the Challenge for 2001, and it will be issued soon. There is a metaphor that we're constructing a five-story building – and you lose a lot if you stop it after just three or four floors. Superintendents' advocacy is critical for ensuring that the final stories do get built. Some superintendents are



expressing concern about the earmarks on this funding. However, this is not unique to the Challenge.

The Inter-regional NRC group is taking on a greater role for fostering communication on what's occurring in each region. There was a suggestion that regional public information people be more strongly involved in getting the word out to the public on the benefits that have resulted from the Challenge, as has been done for other programs such as Fee Demo. It was also suggested that the Council engage outside groups (NGOs).

Action: Recommend a memo from the Director or a Deputy Director to all superintendents re Challenge accomplishments.

### "Seamless System of Parks" (Mike Soukup)

Mike is going to talk with the Director about this. It's closely related to our issues of mobile species and habitat fragmentation. Mike also recognizes the role of National Natural Landmarks, in addition to parks, and plans to see if Margi Brooks can brief the Director.

### Marine Protected Areas

Gary Davis is on detail to WASO for two or three years, following up on this recommendation of the Advisory Board report. One aspect will involve getting coastal parks to revise their GMPs to give better attention to this. He is also meeting with superintendents to see what other actions need to be taken.

### Learning Centers (Mike Soukup and Lynne Murdock–NRID)

Thirteen have been funded thus far. The Department may not fully understand their intent, so the planned FY 03 funding was redirected to additional exotic plant teams.

The idea was to provide the infrastructure support to facilitate "parks for science," not building new structures, but taking better advantage of what's already in or near the park. They are also intended to take advantage of the presence of working scientists to contribute to visitors' opportunities to learn about the results of research in the park. The Challenge funding should just be seed money, to facilitate the process; a proposed learning center should be able to happen, even if it isn't funded through the Challenge.

As the concept is being implemented, there are also opportunities to link them with parks' environmental education programs. Learning centers themselves, however, are not intended to focus on environmental education.

There is some confusion about the relationships of learning centers and CESUs. While the intent of learning centers is to be on facilitating research, they have a local focus, while CESUs have a much broader geographic perspective and closer ties with a system of universities. CESUs are partners in most Learning Centers.

A draft report on the five operational learning centers has been prepared, focusing on what was made possible by the centers. Some of the most compelling accomplishments deal with involving students and adults in the studies (citizen science) done through learning centers. Learning centers also fuel interpretive and education programs by funneling science results into these programs. NRAG also suggested that Learning Centers could be the focus of internal education as well. Learning centers need to work on developing their presence on the internet, tied in with the "natural resource profiles" system. The public, including researchers, need to see the benefit that's coming to them. A learning center forum scheduled for the first week in June will discuss several of these issues.

### Farm Bill (Mike Soukup)

A farm bill was passed that, in part, gives USDA APHIS authority to control any wildlife that threatens livestock (Animal Health Protection Act, Title X, subtitle E). We filed comments directly and through OMB, which had some effects. Nevertheless, parks still may be contacted by APHIS and we need to ensure that they abide by the law, as we interpret it. See below for more information.

### **Professional Development** (Tony Knapp and Kathy Jope)

Kathy presented a proposed professional development program, based on competencies and tied with a career development program. Professional development includes not just training and short courses, but also details and developmental assignments. Tony noted that the competencies haven't really been well integrated into NPS operations, or even into Human Resources. They *are* integrated in the Resource Careers program.

Four "core business practices" have been identified by the Training & Development program for 2002:

- Connect with customers
- Provide learning opportunities
- Improve organization effectiveness
- Integrate Training & Development, Human Resources, and Equal Employment processes

The Challenge included "training" in the line-item description for the increase in NRPP project funding but, in part due to not being ready to fund a national natural resource training effort, NRAG decided to use the first NRPP increase in FY 2000 for regional block grants. Regions may use some of this funding for training. A planned FY 2004 NRPP increase could provide more natural resource training funding.

A needs assessment is underway, asking people how important they think each competency is to their job, and how well-prepared they think they are for each competency. The target group now is entry- and journey-level discipline specialists, as well as technicians. Advanced-level discipline specialists and program managers assessment will be done in June. The final report will be issued in September.

A listing is being compiled of all natural resource courses being offered by all federal agencies, as well as courses offered by all land grant universities. This will be presented on the web. We need to identify alternative ways to present some of our training, including web-based self-paced courses and other distance learning approaches.

The Training program is reorganizing. They expect to have an organizational chart in June. The Natural Resource training manager should be announced shortly thereafter.

Action: We need a group to flesh out two aspects of the program that Kathy presented – one focusing on the entry-to-development level, and another focusing on the advanced-level program managers. – Brian Kenner, Craig Axtell, Dave Shaver, Dennis Vasquez (recommended, but not there to agree), Dan Kimball

### **Business Plans** (Brian Kenner)

Brian described the business plan process that occurred at Badlands. The two students who came to the park were top-notch MBA students. The students had been well-prepared, and the park was very pleased with the results. It provides solid documentation for funding that a park needs, over a five-year period, to meet operational standards, which are defined in detail. Consistency with NR-MAP helps with credibility. Brian found developing the plan a useful, though time-consuming, process.

This program has been funded, thus far, by NPCA. NPCA views their participation as a seed project, however, which they see as just about completed. Parks see it as being in their interest to have a business plan, and are looking for ways to fund it. The plans that have been completed provide useful models, which can help reduce the cost. Unfortunately, they quickly become outdated.

NPCA is developing a report to Congress on what they've learned from the process thus far, such as the percentage of needs that are unfunded, and the percentage of funding that is soft money and cannot be relied upon.

### **Implementation of Omnibus Management Act**

Abby prepared a briefing on implementation of each section of the first two titles of the “Thomas act”. Many in the NPS are unaware of it, or see it as a concessions reform act. Many of the actions were delegated to the regions. There has been limited inquiry from Congress about implementation, beyond the Concessions title.

### Org Codes for Networks

The network-based organization codes allow better accounting, and also reflect the fact that these are shared funds. PWEs reflect the funding intent, such as NII indicating I&M. No real concerns were raised.

### Multi-Year Budget Planning

Last November, the Director issued a memo stating the intent to move to a five-year-forward budgeting program. For Natural Resources, the initial implementation effort focuses on NRPP. There are several different approaches that we can take to NRPP. (We note that a one-year call was recently issued for Fee Demo.)

#### Budget Planning Timeframe:

Option 1 – National panel would rate and rank proposals, and develop a fixed five-year list of projects (rating 2 years in the next call and adding “outyears” in the future until a 5-year list is developed)

Option 2 – Fixed two-year list, with the three out-years being more flexible

The intent is that this will not apply to the Regional block grant or Small Park portions of NRPP.

#### Priority-Setting for Out-Years:

Option 1 – Allocate out-years based on NR-MAP

Option 2 – Allocate out-years by paneling Regions’ highest-priority out-year proposals

Since the out-year list is tentative, some felt that it doesn’t make sense to devote the staff time to assemble even conceptual-level proposals for the out-years. There is concern that the out-year lists, though intended to be tentative, will take on a life of their own. There are also capacity issues that limit parks’ ability to develop projects for out-years, in addition to developing solid proposals for the next two years and administering projects that are funded.

Despite the drawbacks and difficulties of projecting outyear projects, it was noted that they will be facilitated as we move into a process of planning longer-term resource stewardship strategies. Many of the problems that have arisen have been due to being dependent only on PMIS in the last few years, and not a comprehensive RMP-type database of projects built on longer-term strategies. RAMS software will help and this longer-term budget formulation will encourage more strategic and long-range perspectives.

There was a consensus for budget planning Option 2—a firm 2-year list, with tentative outyear proposals. It was noted that most other 5-year plans change in the outyears anyway, and one fund source, fee demo, is only now requesting projects for the current fiscal year. Therefore, a decision to do a 5-year program but state that its outyears are tentative complies as well or better than most fund sources with the budget policy.

The Budget Office is stating that it’s very important to have a firm list now for FY04. We will be at a disadvantage if we don’t. However, when the last Servicewide call came out, firm project lists for FY 2004 were not requested. In response to the current call, not all regions submitted enough solid proposals to develop a full list for FY03 as well as FY04.

To attempt to meet the Budget Office's request, the proposals that were already submitted will be used to develop a fixed list for FY03 and, if possible, for FY04. If this results in more than normal skewing of results on a region-by-region basis, i.e., penalizing regions that did not submit good FY 2004 lists, WASO will have a conference call with the Regions to discuss the next step.

In November '02, the call will be for firm proposals for a FY05 fixed list of new starts and tentative proposals for a FY06 tentative list.

Even though the Budget Office had requested this approach for all funding sources, WASO NRSS proposed it only for the NRPP funds, since other fund sources are not line items. However, the group agreed that this approach makes sense for all of the national natural resource fund sources.

**Actions:**

There was agreement that the instructions are too complicated and long. Several regions that have developed abbreviated versions will send them to Abby. Editing suggestions are welcome.

If there are sufficient, high-quality proposals submitted for FY 03 a firm fixed list covering FY 2004 will also be developed. If there are difficulties, WASO will have a conference call with the Regions to discuss the next step.

In November 2002, the call will be for firm proposals for a FY 05 fixed list of new starts and tentative proposals for a FY 06 tentative list. This assumes a firm fixed list is in place for FY 2004.

**Cooperative Conservation Initiative (CCI)** (Dan Kimball)

The total for NPS is expected to be between \$5 M and \$22 M. Funds would be one-year funds. In fact, the initiative may only last for one year. This was not in the FY03 comprehensive call, so proposals would need to be solicited.

Currently there is no authority to spend it outside of parks, except where clearly linked with NPS programs with external authority. WASO is seeking authority to work on cooperative resource projects outside of parks. (It was noted that Yellowstone recently got a solicitor's opinion stating that they are authorized to participate in an interagency bison plan, which would include expending funds outside of the park.)

Administrative support is limited to 2 FTE servicewide.

Requires a 50% non-federal share. Non-feds would be permitted to submit proposals (for work within the park or associated with a program). NPS would decide on priorities.

**Options:**

- 1 – Allocate to Regions based on NR-MAP
- 2 – Fund servicewide "Director's" projects
- 3 – Administer through CESUs – The difference between the universities' standard overhead and the 15% qualifies as a non-federal contribution. Once obligated, the funding becomes multi-year. It's imperative, however, that we be careful about distinguishing between work that would be appropriately done through cooperative agreements and what should instead be done through contracts.

A suggestion was made that "sustainability" projects should be recognized as being consistent with the intent of this funding. These projects could easily involve major partners. However, projects must meet the criteria of restoration or information needs.

The question was raised as to whether regions have the capacity to use existing partners and/or develop new

partners, and also to administer this amount of funding, in view of the strict cap placed on administrative support. The largest regions stated that they could.

Whether we have the authority to work outside of parks will make a critical difference. It's also important to know whether this funding will continue beyond one year, which will influence whether we focus on projects to set the stage for longer-term partnerships. We should involve the National Park Foundation in identifying partners.

Recommendation: If this is likely to be a one-year program, WASO should issue a call for very brief proposals, as soon as it's clear that some level of funding *will* be appropriated for this. If it's going to be longer-term, consider dividing the funding among Regions.

Action: A work group to further scope out options, design how the call will be issued, and develop a schedule, was named: Dan Kimball, Skip Ladd, Bob McIntosh, Gary Vequist, John Yancy, Kathy Jope.

### PMIS Database

WASO has been trying to make use of the database, and has found many errors. One of the most problematic is proposals that are shown as Regionally approved and have been funded, but are not shown as funded. Also important is ensuring that these proposals make at least some sense. The PMIS information is widely used and errors affect the credibility of our needs.

### Resource Activity Management System (RAMS)

Work on developing this has been underway since late in FY00. It's based on the recommendations of a 30-person work group, and involves natural and cultural resources.

There was some delay due to development of the current version of PMIS and because the Dept. of Energy had a major project to develop the server, which we will be using.

3rd quarter of FY02 – Beta-testing, including identifying standards reports that should be generated

Late July – Deployment

Aug 26-30 and Sept 16-20 – Train-the-trainers at NCTC, with field training to follow

Most work is done off-line, so there is a need to have a fairly large software package on local computers. This will be available either on-line or via CD. It was not designed to work on a local network, since there are so many versions of networks. Editing is done locally, and then synchronized on-line with the main server to upload data to PMIS and OFS.

Once project information has been uploaded from RAMS to PMIS, it is locked in RAMS and can no longer be edited. There are many standard tables that are, or can be, automatically generated. Extensive options exist for on-line custom searches of the database.

Each region will be asked to identify a RAMS Coordinator (natural and cultural).

The system asks for:

- Management Prescriptions, which lead to
- Activities, which lead to
- Actions (including base-funded work), which lead to
- Funded Activities and Actions, which lead to
- Activity and Action Tracking (e.g. compliance completed), which lead to
- Accomplishments, which lead to
- Analyses of Results, which lead to
- Management Prescriptions, which lead to....

## **NRID Education Functions** (Mike Whatley)

Mike Whatley is the chief of the new Information Services Branch in the Natural Resources Information Division. It includes publications, an education specialist, and an interpretive liaison, as well as a public information person. They may be able to help a park communicate good information on natural resource topics, targeting certain types of media and focusing on specific messages.

RMPs were useful in summarizing information and issues, which helped interpreters and others in their communication efforts.

The branch was able to put significant amounts of information on InsideNPS, with the intent that it be a reference site. Under "Programs," click on "Natural Resource Stewardship and Science," and then "Natural Resource Information Division," and then the branch of interest. In "Information Services" is information on the functions of the branch, as well as their staff and roles.

Key people and programs include:

- Nina Roberts, in Education Outreach, is linking with organizations such as the National Science Teachers Association.
- Lynne Murdock is the Natural Resources Interpretive Liaison, located in the Washington Office. She also coordinates Learning Centers.
- Jeff Selleck, who edits Park Science and Natural Resources Year in Review.
- Carrie Ellen Gauthier is a publications development specialist, who assists with technical reports as well as briefing papers.

In conjunction with the NPS's marine conservation efforts, the branch has developed a fee demo project proposal to draft a community outreach strategy for NPS units in the Virgin Islands.

They are looking at what can be done with training. For example, they saw that an alternative to doing a week-long geology course is to do a two-day course attached to the National Science Teachers Association conference, another two-day course (six months later) attached to the Geological Society of America conference, and another two-day course attached to another conference.

## **Information Needs Assessment** (Dave Shaver)

There were two aspects of the "make information usable" component of the Challenge. One aspect involves management of the data being collected, and the other involves obtaining the information required for park management planning and decision-making. This second aspect leads to an information needs assessment.

Dave Shaver presented an overview of the current plan to have contractor-assisted field workshops involving "users" and an assessment of their natural resource information needs. The workshops (as well as individual interviews) would ask the users of information: What information do you need in your jobs? What format do you need it in? How can it be made available and usable? A consultant in Boise (Common Threads, Inc.) has been identified who has been working with the fire program on a similar effort. Some members voiced strong agreement on this approach, although some felt that initial efforts and material previously distributed to NRAG members had too much focus on "data needs/management" instead of "information needs." Most agreed that a business needs assessment could be useful. Some concern was expressed that the universe of needs is too immense for us to grasp, but no alternatives were posed. Agreement was reached to move ahead with a "core team" planning meeting to better define objectives, method, and expected products. Then a more detailed plan will be sent to NRAG.

Action: After the core team meets with the consultant to define the information needs assessment project, additional information will be provided to NRAG prior to holding field workshops. WASO will request nominees for a core work group—there was little response to a previous request on this topic. Kathy Jope did volunteer and George



Dickison earlier agreed to participate.

### Planning Guidance (Gary Mason)

We are anticipating that resource planning will become a DO-2.1, linked with the DO-2 Planning. DO-2 sunsets this year. Planning policy itself will not be revised, but there will be revision of implementation guidelines. We are aiming at having a draft RM guidance issued by the end of the year.

### Natural Resource Management Assessment Program (NR-MAP) (Gary Mason)

Meetings with groups of parks (e.g. Alaska) have been occurring, to identify specific areas in which the NR-MAP algorithms need to be revised to address atypical situations. An update of the DOS-based software may not be workable, so may need to develop a Windows-based program, which will delay the process by a couple of months.

Parks are continuing to enter the data in very different ways – even such seemingly straightforward data such as miles of boundary – indicating that better guidance and/or more substantial regional review will be needed.

Subsequent to the meeting, a proposed schedule, developed by Tim Goddard, was circulated to the NRAG. Because workshops to undertake changes to some aspects of the the program were not held on schedule, the update process has been delayed. There was considerable difficulty getting properly filled out profiles for the workshops, raising concern about the need for training and careful oversight. To meet the original deadline of November 2002, the distribution of instructions to parks would be required by July 16 and completed profiles would be needed from parks to regional coordinators by August 16, with regional review and modifications by September 13. NRAG members were asked to respond by June 17 as to whether this is feasible or it would be better to postpone the update.

### Geology Action Planning (Dave Shaver)

An action plan for geology is being developed, similar to the action plans that formed the basis of the NR Challenge. A meeting of the core team was held in mid-April, and a draft should be ready for initial review by the review team and NRAG by the end of May. It does not duplicate but complements the work of GRD.

### National Cave and Karst Research Institute (NCKRI) (Dave Shaver)

An interim Director was hired in FY00. Now, for the first time it has received base funding (\$350 K), so it is possible to establish a permanent Director position (GS-14/15). While it is located at Carlsbad (the city, not the park), it is fully intended to be a national, and even international, institute. Its mandate includes education as well as research. The staffing plan provides for about a dozen people.

It has been ramping up more quickly than we expected, and it now looks like there will be funding (perhaps \$2 M) for a building. The legislation requires *all* expenditures to have a non-federal match, which the State of New Mexico has been providing.

### Specimen Curation (Rich Gregory)

A workshop will be held in September to develop draft protocols for curation of natural resource specimens. A curator is going to be hired, supervised by the Curatorial program but located in Fort Collins. Options for regional repositories for voucher specimens are being explored in coordination with the chief curator, Ann Hitchcock.

### Compliance (Jake Hoogland)

They are developing a proposal to:

- Standardize how we post NEPA documents on the net

- Provide a computerized program for data analysis for responding to comments received over the internet
- Examining how to better link Maximo with NEPA and 106 compliance requirements

It was noted that park natural resource staff is being buried in compliance workload, generated largely by the maintenance backlog together with demands of the Fire program. Jake's effort may help somewhat.

#### **Impairment** (Dan Kimball)

A status report was distributed. By the end of June, there should be a draft available for review.

Action: Chris Shaver is soliciting nominations of people who have expertise that would be useful in this review.

#### **Farm Bill: Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002** (Gary Johnston)

Animal "disease" is defined as meaning anything that the Secretary wants it to mean. "Pest" also is broadly defined as just about any organism that may directly or indirectly harm livestock.

Before action is taken against pests or diseases, the Secretary is required only to "consult and coordinate" with involved agencies. Unfortunately there is no statement that "the authorities of this Act do not supercede authorities provided by other laws" such as the NPS Organic Act. In October, there will likely be some "technical amendments" legislation that may provide us another opportunity for needed changes to be made. We will also probably seek a formal Solicitor's opinion concerning USDA's authority on NPS lands.

A few concerns have been expressed about the legislation by environmental groups. They may urge certain wording in the "technical amendments" bill. NRAG members requested additional guidance for parks on how to respond if the issue arises in a park.

#### **Natural Resource Awards** (Dave Shaver)

Refined guidance is needed for each award on whether it is intended to focus on specific achievements, or whether it is intended to be more like a lifetime-achievement award.

Clarification is also needed on the types of people intended to be targeted by the Professional Excellence Award.

There is also a question about which awards are open to central office personnel.

When NRAG agreed to establish the Professional Excellence award, NRAG recognized that it would be appropriate for a very diverse mix of people.

Action: There will be a follow-up email to NRAG, inviting nominees for a work group to clarify guidance on awards.

**NNLs** – The National Natural Landmark program will be a subject of the next NRAG meeting. Margi Brooks (acting national NNL coordinator) is preparing a paper on operational issues. She will be present for discussion of this topic.

#### **Construction Guidance**

Apparently revised guidance is being produced on this, but we have no details. It's imperative that adequate funding be provided for the compliance necessary for design and construction projects. The percentage ceiling that the NPS has been applying is unique to the NPS; no other agency, to our knowledge, has partitioned the compliance costs as we have.

Actions: NRAG members should send nominations of people who would like to possible work on natural resource guidance related to construction to Jake Hoogland.

## Director's Orders for Natural Resources

A status report on the various natural resource-related DOs was distributed. The question was asked, do the management policies stand on their own, or do we need an over-arching DO-77? Or is an RM-77 adequate? With impairment, we have the Management Policies and we're tiering a Reference Manual directly from the policies, without a DO. We can do this for many of the other natural resource topics as well.

The consensus was that a general DO won't serve a useful purpose beyond Management Policies. The specific listed DOs – such as on wetlands and on IPM – are useful. What we should do is verify that these are addressing all of the specific needed programs.

### Next meeting

Not weeks Oct 28, Nov 4, or 18.

Location: Carlsbad (difficult access?), Minneapolis (Jim LaRock will propose some possibilities), Denver, Marsh-Billings.

Suggested topics:

NNL Program

Strategy on competitive sourcing, including possible use of **Maximo** for natural resources

Attendees (for part or entire meeting):

#### Alaska

Ralph Tingey

Dave Mills

Alex Carter

#### Pacific West

Jim Shevock

Kathy Jope

#### Intermountain

Skip Ladd

Ellis Richard

#### Midwest

Gary Vequist

Brian Kenner

Jim LaRock

#### Southeast

Jerry O'Neal

John Yancy

#### National Capital

Jim Sherald

Mel Poole

#### Northeast

Bob McIntosh

Doug Morris

Mary Foley

NRSS

Mike Soukup  
Abby Miller  
Dave Shaver  
Dan Kimball  
Craig Axtell  
Rich Gregory  
Jake Hoogland  
Gary Mason  
Gary Johnston  
Mike Whately  
Lynne Murdock

Catoctin Mountain Park/NCR

Jim Voight  
Carolyn Davis  
Diane Pavcek