

Subject: March 2000 Monthly Report- WASO Natural Resources

ADNRSS MONTHLY REPORT: March 2000

NATURAL RESOURCE CHALLENGE

EXOTIC PLANT MANAGEMENT TEAMS SELECTED Exotic Plant Management Teams were selected for funding in FY 2000. These teams will spearhead efforts to control alien weeds in NPS units located in the Hawaiian Islands, Florida, National Capital Region, and the Chihuahuan Desert/Shortgrass Prairie.

LEARNING CENTERS SELECTED Five Learning Centers have been selected to be funded with the \$900,000 for Learning Centers proposed in the FY 01 budget. The centers are The five programs are for: Point Reyes National Seashore, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, Cape Cod National Seashore, and southwestern Alaska.

CHALLENGE UPDATE A memorandum to the field will be transmitted shortly, updating Service personnel on the status of FY 2000 actions funded through the Challenge, FY 2001 proposals, the new Natural Resource Challenge Council, and planning for FY 2002. The memorandum will include several attachments that provide details of all of the activities summarized.

SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

NATIONAL CORAL REEF ACTION PLAN APPROVED - A National Action Plan to Conserve Coral Reefs was adopted by the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force at their March 2 meeting in Washington D.C. National Park Service representatives participated on many of the working groups that developed this national action plan which calls for increased federal and state interagency actions to understand coral reef ecosystems and reduce the adverse impacts of human activities. Some of the specific action items involving NPS coral reef parks include mapping of reef systems, completing inventories and monitoring of reef health, conducting strategic research, increasing protection and reducing human impacts. Base funding increases to coral reef parks has been provided to help them meet the requirements of the national action plan. The national coral reef task force was formed as a result of Executive Order 13089 calling for increased protection of our nation's coral reefs. The complete national action plan and working group reports can be found at <http://coralreef.gov>.

SNOWMOBILE SUMMIT - In January 1999, the NPS received a petition to prohibit snowmobile use in national parks from the Bluewater Network. As a result, a snowmobile summit was held this past February, hosted by the Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks as an attempt to share information concerning snowmobile use, its impacts, and current NPS policy. Superintendents from the various parks where snowmobile use occurs were invited to share their experiences and ideas on how best to approach this issue. Several presentations were given during the two-day meeting including presentations on impacts to air, water, wildlife and soundscape resources. The different management options proposed were a servicewide ban, regulated use through a permit system, or

special regulations to allow for this activity, similar to current PWC policy. The Department and NPS will be moving forward on new policy very shortly.

HEADS UP

LYNX LISTED - On March 21, 2000, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed Canada lynx in the lower 48 states as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Lynx occur in a number of NPS units from Maine to Washington State.

BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOGS DESIGNATED AS CANDIDATE - On February 3, 2000, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated the Black-tailed prairie dog as a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Candidate status means that this species appears to qualify for protection under the ESA. A proposal to list this is planned. Black-tailed prairie dogs occur in several NPS units located in the Midwest and Intermountain Regions.

OTHER NEWS/ACCOMPLISHMENTS

BIOLOGICAL SUPPORT FUNDING - USGS Biological Resources Division (BRD) announced the 21 Park Oriented Biological Support (POBS) projects that will be funded this year and the additional 4 projects that will be funded starting in FY 2001. POBS projects are proposed by USGS personnel in partnership with benefiting parks, focus on emerging research or technical assistance, and receive up to 2 years of funding from a joint NPS-BRD funding source. The 25 projects announced this month are distributed across all 7 NPS regions and include 9 technical assistance and 16 exploratory research efforts.

PARKS CANADA & ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY - The Canadian Minister for Canadian Heritage publicly accepted the report of the Parks Canada Panel on Ecological Integrity on March 23 and told Parks Canada to implement it. The panel's report recommends that Parks Canada take several steps to demonstrate it is changing before it should be allowed to seek new funds (recommended total over 5 years of \$328 million). The report recommends that Parks Canada confirm ecological integrity as the priority for Canada's national parks and as the explicit responsibility of every staff member and that it implement new training, staffing, decision-making, and accountability structures. You can obtain volumes I and II plus news releases, etc. of the report of the Parks Canada Panel on Ecological Integrity at the following address: < <http://ecolog.org> > .

BIGGS MINE EXPANSION - Despite comments from the National Park Service and other groups, the Bureau of Land Management approved an expansion of the Briggs open-pit, cyanide heap leach gold mine adjacent to Death Valley NP. NPS comments on the Environmental Assessment identified adverse impacts to ground and surface water, bat habitat, bighorn sheep, wetlands, and the night sky of Death Valley. The BLM decision document failed to adequately address NPS concerns and upheld the "finding of no significant impact" originally issued with the draft environmental assessment. For more information see the Briggs website at: <http://www.canyonresources.com/projects/briggs.html>.

DRY HOLE OFFSHORE OF PADRE ISLAND Kockrell Oil's wildcat exploration well failed to find commercial quantities of oil or gas and was plugged and abandoned. Located 2 miles offshore, the jack up rig used to drill the well was large enough to be a significant visual intrusion. The well was drilled directionally towards the island with a bottomhole location about 1 mile offshore. Had the well been a discovery, the Seashore may have faced either the visual intrusion of a permanent production facility offshore or the direct impacts of a facility tucked behind the dune line on the island.

SURVEY OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC - The National Survey of the American Public was approved by OMB and is currently underway. The purpose of the survey is to assess the opinions and attitudes of a representative sample of the American public related to the National Park System. Four basic areas of inquiry are included in the project: 1) What are the perceptions and attitudes of the American Public toward the Recreation Fee Demonstration Program? 2) What are the barriers that inhibit visitation to National Park System units? 3) What are the visitation patterns that characterize experience with National Park System units? and 4) What are the general public attitudes toward select National Park System issues we face, including interest in attending public meetings and preservation of natural plant and animal species? Results will be reported at the Discovery 2000 Conference in September.

PADRE ISLAND OIL AND GAS MANAGEMENT PLAN/EIS COMPLETED - The Oil and Gas Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement for Padre Island National Seashore was released in March for a 30-day "No Action" period. A Record of Decision describing the selected alternative will be signed at the end of the period in April 2000. The selected alternative designates "Sensitive Resource Areas" to protect specific park resources that are susceptible to adverse impacts from oil and gas operations. Exploration, drilling, and production operations would be restricted or not permitted in these areas. The plan will assist operators in the planning and development of nonfederal oil and gas operations in the park.

WATER QUALITY INVENTORY STUDY PLANS APPROVED - The Natural Resources Information and Water Resources Divisions have evaluated and approved the Level 1 Water Quality Inventory Study Plans that were submitted in response to the FY 2000 call. Initial Inventory and Monitoring funding in FY 2000 will consist of \$52,740 for continuing inventories and \$84,600 for new inventories for a total of \$137,340. In addition, 8 parks requested assistance in conducting their Level I Water Quality Inventories. The Water Resources Division has submitted a request for assistance from districts of the U.S. Geological Survey to the agency's headquarters office in Reston, VA. The parks should expect to be contacted by USGS district representatives within the next few weeks.

VISITOR SURVEYS - In FY99, the Social Science Program processed 25 visitor surveys under the expedited approval program. FY 2000 submissions total 10 to date. In response to one submission it has been decided that gender-neutral names will be used if the survey methodology includes descriptive scenarios regarding park users as "couples." The annual report on the Expedited Approval for NPS Visitor Surveys, which documents \$34,500 in savings in the program's first year, is available on the Social Science Program website at: <<http://www.nps.gov/socialscience/waso/products.htm>>.

REPORTS

REVISED SNOWMOBILE REPORT - The Air Resource Division (ARD) released a revised report entitled "Air Quality Concerns Related to Snowmobile Usage in National Parks." This report compiles the results of numerous snowmobile studies, including those conducted in Yellowstone and Grand Teton NPs, to assist park managers throughout the National Park System in making decisions regarding snowmobile use in national parks. The snowmobile report is available on the ARD website at http://www2.nature.nps.gov/ard/pubs/snowmobile_report.htm.

GEOLOGY MEETING REPORT - The Geology of Coastal Ecosystems Workshop Report summarizing the coastal workshop held in Ocean City, MD, September 8-10, 1999 is complete and ready for distribution. The workshop was cosponsored by the NPS, USGS and the Geological Society of America. The report provides an Executive Summary and seven recommendations or action items to help establish a cooperative relationship between the Park Service and other agencies and institutions, especially the U.S. Geological Survey. The report includes summaries of the five regional breakout sessions, the keynote addresses, field trip information, and a list of NPS and GS contacts for coastal parks.

PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS

GOVERNORS' MEETING - Governor Barnes of Georgia will host the second "Summit on Mountain Air Quality" at Stone Mountain, Georgia, on May 3-4. The first summit, which was held last May, was hosted by Governor Hunt of North Carolina. Governors of the eight Southern Appalachian Mountains Initiative (SAMI) states have been invited to participate. The summit will be in conjunction with SAMI's semiannual meeting on May 2-3. The Governors will discuss the importance of regional cooperation, and they will be briefed on SAMI's ongoing efforts to mitigate the adverse air quality impacts in the Southern Appalachians. For more information, contact John Bunyak (303-969-2818).

INVASIVE SPECIES IN SOUTH AFRICA - Gary Johnston, Biological Resources Management Division, represented the National Park Service at an International Workshop on Invasive Species held in Capetown, South Africa. The workshop was the result of an agreement between the Vice President of the U.S. and the then vice president of South Africa. The purpose of the workshop was to identify and discuss "Best Management Practices to Prevent the Introduction and Control Invasive Species." In addition, meetings were held with resource managers and

other staff from seven South African National Parks to discuss invasive species management practices and other resource management issues.