

Alex Carter

04/05/01 11:03 AM YDT

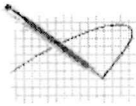
Subject: supplement to monthly report

Forward Header

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My fault this didn't make it, but think you should know:

Natural Resource Program Assignments. In our continuing effort to improve the effectiveness of the Natural Resource Program Center (NRPC), Associate Director Soukup has assigned two NRPC division chiefs and two staff to other divisions for 6-month details, effective March 12. These will help develop the Environmental Quality Division (EQD) and Natural Resources Information Division (NRID) programs resulting from FY 2001 increases, broaden the individuals' experience, and contribute to further integration of programs across the NRPC. These are "full immersion" details, meaning the individuals will not be involved in the duties of the positions they left, except for consulting on decisions that will have long-term effects, such as hiring or policy changes. Rich Gregory, NRID chief, is being assigned to the EQD as deputy. Rich will be primarily responsible for establishing the new Colorado-based components of the EQD program, including an "EIS branch." He will also work with other EQD components to advance links with other NRPC divisions and foster communications with the field. Dave Shaver, Geologic Resources Division (GRD) chief, is being assigned to the NRID as acting chief, with primary responsibility for the broadened education and interpretation program. The NRID program will have the lead for NRPC and be a focal point for natural resource-related education and interpretation Servicewide, in coordination with the WASO Interpretation Division. Dave will also work with the park vital signs program and information management to further integration with other NRPC programs. Carol McCoy and Jim Woods will rotate 3-month assignments as GRD chief during Dave's absence. During this same timeframe, members of the WASO-based NR staff are also being detailed to new assignments. Debby Peck will function as EQD management assistant and help with administrative duties at the Washington end. Gary Mason will be detailed to Debby's position and he will seek field detailees to assist with his normally-assigned duties.



Alex Carter

04/05/01 11:14 AM YDT

Subject: March Monthly Report

NATURAL RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP AND SCIENCE
MARCH 2001 MONTHLY REPORT

NATURAL RESOURCE CHALLENGE

Hearing on Natural Resource Challenge On March 8, Deny Galvin testified before the House Subcommittee on Appropriations on the status of the Natural Resource Challenge. Don Neubacher and Mike Soukup shared the table with him and Doug Morris was also present. Deny started by saying that the 2002 is the third year of a 5-year action plan designed to increase our understanding of natural resources, without detracting from our commitment to visitors. He emphasized our need to better explain and document our decisions. He spoke about the exotic species problem. He mentioned the effort to make parks friendlier to the scientific community, in recognition of the value to society of using the resources in parks for research. Thanking the subcommittee for its past support, he gave some specific examples of what has been done to date with the Challenge funding, including the establishment of Exotic Plant Management Teams, participation in 10 Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units, Learning Centers, and resource projects.

Don Neubacher said the main reason superintendents haven't always been good stewards is that they haven't had the resource tools, and adequate resource management capability and information for good decisions. He stated that business plans at the 27 pilot parks showed that resource management was the area that showed the biggest gap in funding needs. Don stressed the goals of the initiative--inventorying and monitoring, restoring degraded resources, sound science for resource management, getting more researchers to parks, and ensuring that information resulting is shared with the public. Next he stressed that the Challenge is effective because it is systematic, leverages funds, and uses competition used for awarding project and other funds. There were a lot of questions and lively exchanges, focusing on accountability, especially, how we are assuring that the funding won't be diverted to other uses; how elements of the Challenge fit in with BRD and other elements of USGS; CESUs and how they work; implications for visitor services; and declining amphibians. Both Deny and Don were well prepared with specific examples of several of their points (thanks to several park personnel and advisors), which significantly aided them in making their points.

Learning Centers Meet Over 50 people from funded and potential learning centers met at Point Reyes National Seashore the week of March 12. Acting Director Deny Galvin and Comptroller Bruce Sheaffer also attended. Park personnel who wanted to share their ideas initiated the meeting. It provided a good opportunity for everyone to develop a common understanding of the learning center concept, as well as explore the variety of ways the concept can be implemented.

Potential New Exotic Plant Management Teams Selected: These additional teams have been selected through a competitive process for possible future funding as a part of the Natural Resource Challenge in FY 2002. They are; Florida Partnership, Lake Mead, California, Gulf Coast, Northern Great Plains, and Columbia Cascades. These EPMT's were selected from 14 very competitive proposals

that were submitted Service wide. The proposed EPMTs were reviewed and ranked by a highly qualified and diverse panel of National Park Service and Forest Service experts at a proposal review in Fort Collins, CO in February, 2001. Criteria for reviewing the proposals included: significance of resource at risk; severity of threats to resources, readiness, program design, and cost effectiveness.

Park Natural Resource Profiles: The Natural Resource Challenge has committed the NPS to revise park homepages to showcase the fundamental purpose of the park, the park's major resources, and the significance of those resources. The Natural Resource Information Division has been working with the Information & Telecommunications Center (ITC) to develop a data management system that allows park staff to easily enter and maintain resource information as called for by the Challenge. Prototypes can be viewed from the Acadia National Park website (<http://www.nps.gov/acad/>) or the Canyonlands National Park website (<http://www.nps.gov/cany/>) by clicking on Nature and Science under Park Resources. In the initial stages of development, the profiles have been reviewed informally (i.e., via a ccMail request for comments) by the Natural Resource Advisory Group and the Natural Resource Challenge Council. Reactions were very favorable. The ITC hopes to start working soon with one of the regions to have more parks begin entering information into the profile database and a memo will soon be sent to Regional Directors outlining the further implementation of the profiles.

Research Permit and Reporting System (RPRS): The Natural Resource Information Division provided technical training in the operation of the Research Permit and Reporting System (RPRS) during meetings held at Joshua Tree N.P., Seattle, and Ventura. The feedback received from park staff during these training sessions is being used to improve and refine the Internet-based system. Research coordinators at all parks should now be using RPRS to administer and track scientific research and collecting permits.

Regional Inventory and Monitoring (I&M) Coordinators Meeting : The Natural Resources Program Center hosted a meeting to communicate the nature and status of the I&M data themes in the mapping of vegetation, water, soils, geology, air, and base cartography. Other presentations included the NPS fire program, sound monitoring, and planning. Also attending the meeting were representatives from the NPS National Resources Information Division, and the United States Geological Survey Geologic, Biologic, and Mapping Divisions. The goals of the meeting were to meet the coordinators, discuss the different inventories, and make it known that similar presentations are available in the future.

NPSpecies - The NPS Species Database: On February 23, 2001, the Natural Resource Information Division, Inventory and Monitoring Program released the internet-based version of the NPS species database called NPSpecies. This database is the primary tool for park staff to manage species lists (i.e. biodiversity) of vertebrates and vascular plants occurring in park-units. Development of a science-based species list was identified as one of 12 baseline inventories in the Natural Resource Challenge. For the first time, experts at the park level have local control over managing their species lists while simultaneously having efficient global sharing of the information.

NPSpecies has the capabilities to link each species in each park with multiple references, vouchers and/or observations that scientifically support the occurrence, past occurrence or possible occurrence of the species in the park. In the case of references, NPSpecies is directly linked to the internet-based version of the Natural Resource Bibliography, NPBib (previously called NRBib). Consequently, information for both databases can be entered and managed simultaneously. While NPSpecies is currently populated with preliminary data on vertebrates and vascular plants for the ~270 parks with significant natural resources, it has the capabilities to include data for all park-units and all

species (in all five kingdoms), regardless of the taxonomic group. The internet-based version of NPSpecies has both system-level security via login/password and record level security via the flagging of sensitive records. Currently, NPSpecies login/passwords are available to NPS staff and their designated cooperators. As data are sufficiently reviewed and "cleaned" and sensitive records are flagged, data will be released to the public via the internet.

Division Meeting With United States Geological Survey Central Leadership Team (CELT): The United States Geological Survey (USGS) held their monthly Central Executive Leadership Team (CELT) meeting. Staff and management from the Geologic Resources Division met with representatives from all the USGS divisions. GRD staff introduced them to the Division and its role, new staff expertise, and the geologic resources inventory and monitoring program. GRD staff also discussed opportunities for the Survey to get involved in Park Service efforts to increase education, outreach, and science-based resources management. Staff believes that they caught their attention on some of these issues.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

USGS Conducts Coal Briefing: Under the National Coal Resource Assessment program, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is studying five regions of the country: Colorado Plateau, Northern Rocky Mountains and Great Plains, Appalachian, Gulf Coast, and Illinois Basin. USGS hosted a briefing to discuss results of the recently completed Colorado Plateau (Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah) report. Maps and overlays were presented from the report showing location, depth, and quality of the coal deposits. It was noted that there are about 0.5 trillion tons of coal in the Colorado Plateau but only about 38% of that coal is economically attainable. Coal bed methane reserves are also covered in the newly released report.

Public Meetings on Water Rights for Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park: The NPS held public meetings concerning the water rights quantification for Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park on February 28 and March 1 in Gunnison and Delta, respectively. The meetings were the beginning of a negotiation process proposed by NPS to resolve the quantification issue.

Marine National Park/National Marine Sanctuary Manager's Retreat: On February 21-22, Superintendents and managers from National Park units and National Marine Sanctuaries located in close proximity to one another met at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, W. Va. The retreat focused on the implementation of a new General Agreement calling for increased coordination and cooperation between the National Park Service and the National Marine Sanctuaries System in managing marine protected areas and programs. Joint challenges and opportunities for cooperation were identified, with the primary objectives of linking efforts at the local and national levels and achieving increased management efficiency. Participants agreed to form three national level working groups to address national policy and planning issues, national stewardship activities, and coordinated law enforcement.

Supreme Court Ruling Upholds EPA Standards: On February 27, 2001 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Environmental Protection Agency's approach to setting new ambient air quality standards for ozone and fine particulate matter. The Court struck down the D.C. District Court ruling that EPA exceeded its delegation of authority by Congress. This ruling also upheld the District Court's finding that EPA is prevented from considering costs in setting national standards. The Supreme Court remanded to EPA the procedures for implementing the ozone standard, requiring new rulemaking. Future District Court action is expected to resolve the non-constitutional issues, such as EPA's choice of the standard's levels.

During the period from March 14th to the 21st, three wolves died after being immobilized and radio collared as part of a long-term research project involving predator/prey relationships between wolves and moose and caribou. The wolves died in three separate incidents on different days. Two wolf carcasses were recovered for necropsy; a third was totally consumed by other wolves. Preliminary necropsy results on the two wolves recovered indicate that each had a defective heart valve (endocarditis) that MAY have contributed to its death. The wolf that was consumed by pack members was in very poor health (emaciated). An investigation has been begun into the deaths. Ranger Tom Habecker is the case officer. A panel consisting of outside experts will be convened to review the incident. Immobilizations have been suspended until further notice. Media interest has been high. At least one of the wolves had been widely photographed and was well known to park visitors and professional photographers and film crews. (from Ranger Morning Report, 3/29/01)

Energy Exploration and Production Increasing: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) published a Notice of Intent to conduct a 3-D seismic survey in the Big Flat area northeast of Canyonlands National Park. The Geologic Resources Division provided comments to BLM on the Notice as well as on a BLM draft environmental impact statement for oil and gas development on the Southern Ute Indian Reservation adjacent to Mesa Verde NP. The programmatic document analyzed exploration and production of conventional natural gas and coal bed methane wells on the Reservation. The drilling may result in an expansion of approximately 680 wells.

OTHER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Texas House Bill Number 128: Superintendent Frank Deckert, Big Bend National Park (BIBE) delivered testimony before the Texas Committee on Environmental Regulation regarding a proposed bill relating to protecting air quality related values (AQRVs) at BIBE and Guadalupe Mountains National Park (GUMO). However, the Bill, as drafted, is bad public policy because it would not achieve its intended purpose of protecting AQRVs. In fact, it may have the opposite effect by undermining our current AQRV protection efforts by limiting the role of the Federal Land Manager in the new source review process. Therefore, Superintendent Deckert asked the Committee not to move forward with the proposed bill. The Air Resources Division assisted with the testimony.

Carlsbad Caverns Report Completed: Carlsbad Caverns National Park requested an assessment of a geohazard at Iceberg Rock. The hazard involved the collapse (no injuries) of about 5 tons of rock onto a trail within the cave. The rocks were from an overhead area hand-stacked by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the early 1930's. The Geologic Resources Division prepared a report recommending possible actions to be taken on unstable road cuts along the access road to park facilities to reduce the risk of rock falls in two areas. The clean-up process removed the trail blockage and stabilized remaining problem areas.

Shi Shi Beach Exploration Plan Reviewed: The Olympic National Park management team in consultation with the Geologic Resources Division reviewed the most recent Special Use Permit for the exploration of 198 acres of non-federal minerals for the purpose of acquisition. The U.S. Geodetic Survey completed a survey of the property boundaries September 2000, identifying the average High Water line and average High Water line separating the Marine Sanctuary, Olympic NP, and private mineral rights. This information should help resolve the boundary issue, although geologic and historic evidence indicates a very low probability of locating a commercial mineral deposit.

FOIA Snowmobile Effects and Monitoring Documents Completed: Final submission of pertinent documents responding to the Wilderness Society FOIA request on

snowmobile and PWC effects and monitoring is near completion. WASO Natural Resource staff was able to compile all applicable information for the request earlier this month. The documents have been reviewed by the Wilderness Society and the necessary copies have been made and awaiting formal transmittal.

The Peer Review Panel for the Park Flight Migratory Bird Program Met: This meeting was held with the National Park Foundation (NPF) officials to review proposals for bird conservation and education projects in national parks in the United States. Recommendations were forwarded to the Senior Review Panel, which included representatives of NPS, NPF, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The Senior Review Panel then met and recommended that seven proposals be funded. Parks can expect to hear from the National Park Foundation by late March/early April concerning the status of their proposal.

Status of Crater Lake National Park Water Right Claims

A pre-hearing conference for the contested water right claims at Crater Lake National Park in the Klamath Adjudication was held on March 22. At the conference, the United States Department of Justice informed the hearing officer that the United States accepts an earlier decision by the adjudicator that the appropriate priority date for reserved water rights at the park is 1902, not 1886 as was originally claimed. The hearing officer directed the parties (NPS and contestants) to develop a stipulation of agreement to this fact.

More than 13,000 endangered bonytail fish were released in the Green River in Browns Park NWR on March 23rd. The refuge is immediately upstream from Dinosaur NM. The two- to four-inch fish are expected to acclimate to riverine conditions, then be redistributed downstream during the spring runoff. Bonytail fish have been virtually extirpated from the wild. About 10,000 were released in the Green and Yampa rivers last summer; this release is a continuation of the attempt to reestablish wild populations in historic habitats. Populations of three other endangered Colorado River fish - the Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, and humpback chub - still exist within the park. (from Ranger Morning Report 3/28/01)

OTHER INFORMATION

Interagency Training Broadcast on Air Quality Conformity: The Air Resources Division participated in an interagency training for field managers on federal air quality regulations. The training was a satellite broadcast program taped at the BLM National Training Center in Phoenix, AZ on March 22, 2001. The ninety-minute broadcast focused on the requirements of all federal land management agencies to perform a technical analysis determining whether or not any federal action would violate State air quality plans (i.e., not "conform" to the objectives and/or emission budgets of state plans). The air conformity analysis is a separate requirement from the NEPA analysis process, but can interfere in the implementation of a federal action if not properly documented. The National Park Service participated along with experts from EPA, USFS, BLM and FWS.

International Migratory Bird Day Materials Sent to all Park Units: The Park Flight Migratory Bird Program will soon be sending all NPS units a set of 2001 International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) materials, including the poster, educational magazine, and Partners in Flight Resource Directory. The focus of 2001 IMBD is on shade grown coffee. Parks are encouraged to register their events on-line at <http://birds.fws.gov/imbd.html> so visitors and neighboring communities can learn of opportunities to participate in NPS IMBD activities.

PROFESSIONAL MEETING ATTENDANCE/PAPERS

NPS Gives Presentation on Park Flight Migratory Bird Program: This paper was

presented at the Partners in Flight Management Steering Committee meeting in Lexington Park, Maryland. Bird conservation experts from other federal agencies, state agencies, non-governmental organizations, foundations, universities, and industry were present. Park Flight Program's goals and accomplishments, and the contributions of NPS to other Partners in Flight efforts such as the sponsorship of International Migratory Bird Day. This meeting was held in conjunction with the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Washington, D.C.

STAFF NEWS

New-Hire for Air Resources Division: Aaron Worstell joined the ARD in March to fill the vacant Environmental Engineer position. For the past four years, Aaron worked as an environmental engineer for the Environmental Protection Agency, and before that, he worked for the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. Aaron's primary responsibilities will pertain to in-park air quality issues. He will survey in-park activities to quantify the types and amounts of park air emissions, recommend ways for parks to prevent and reduce emissions, and determine park compliance with air regulatory requirements.

NPS Liaison to Partners in Flight: Carol Beidleman, Park Flight Migratory Bird Coordinator, will serve as the NPS liaison to Partners in Flight (PIF). Carol will work to increase NPS involvement in PIF activities such as International Migratory Bird Day, attend national PIF meetings, and share and disseminate information.