

Subject: November Natural Resources monthly report

NATURAL RESOURCES STEWARDSHIP AND SCIENCE
NOVEMBER MONTHLY REPORT

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

RECOVERIES UNDER THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM RESOURCES
PROTECTION ACT

(NPSRPA)-Over \$4 Million was recovered by the
Environmental

Response, Planning and Assessment (ERPA) unit of the
Environmental

Quality Division for resource restoration under the NPSRPA
during

the last fiscal year. Funds recovered are deposited into
the

Department's interest bearing Restoration Fund, which was
specifically established and authorized to receive these
funds.

The recoveries are held in that fund pending disbursement
when

recovery plans actions have been developed and approved.
The

recoveries held in this account for the NPS accrued over
\$114,000

in interest. The required yearly reporting to Congress is
being

prepared on these recoveries. That report will also
describe the

recoveries obtained under other statutory authorities,
such as the

Oil Pollution Act and CERCLA.

ABANDONED MINE RESEARCH NEARS COMPLETION - A team of
Colorado

School of Mines senior design engineers recently completed
three

full-scale compression tests of polyurethane mine shaft
plugs at

the Bureau of Reclamation's Material Engineering &
Research

Laboratory. The one year project has included computer

modeling,
laboratory bench testing for shear strength, compression strength,
and tensile strength. The cooperative effort between the Geologic Resources Division, the Bureau of Reclamation, academia and the product manufacturer has resulted in a cost effective, engineered solution that protects park visitors from hazards associated with abandoned mine openings.

UPDATE

CONTINUING RESPONSE FOR SHIP GROUNDING AT SAN JUAN NHS
The 15,000 ton vessel SERGO Zakaraidze remains grounded immediately off El Morro Castle at SAJU. Representatives from ERPA are assisting park staff in working with the US Coast Guard in planning for removal of the ship's cargo contents (consisting of several thousand tons of cement) and minimizing impacts to El Morro from the grounding and cargo removal. The removal action is expected to take several weeks.

VISIBILITY DEGRADATION AT BIG BEND: Deteriorating visibility at Big Bend National Park prompted a meeting between Director Stanton and the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission. Staff from the Air Resources Division and Big Bend NP also attended the meeting. The discussion focused on the status of various pollution reduction programs in Texas, while acknowledging the importance of addressing pollution from Mexico. An agreement was reached to jointly assess the effectiveness of current and planned programs with respect to their impact on air quality at Big Bend and to continue working together on a regional and binational scale. The NPS highlighted the importance of reversing the degrading air quality trend at Big Bend and reserved the right to request additional remedial action if adequate progress toward this goal is not anticipated to result from pending programs.

WEST NILE RIVER VIRUS The spread of West Nile River Virus in the

Northeast has been addressed by representatives of the IPM program and the Public Health Service. A message was prepared and distributed via the Morning Report to alert employees to symptoms of the West Nile River Virus and to request that dead crows be collected for analysis for the potential presence of the virus. A Mosquito Issue Workshop was coordinated and presented by SERO IPM and WASO IPM representatives. Participants included USFWS, NPS, and mosquito control representatives. The workshop addressed NPS policies concerning control, control methodology, and planning for control and management actions.

COAL LEASE DEAL COMPLETED IN KAIPAROWITS AREA - Andalex Resources Company has accepted a \$14 million buyout settlement for its 17 Federal coal leases near Glen Canyon NRA. The buyout effectively eliminates the threat of a mine haul road through Glen Canyon NRA as well as potential air quality, water quality, and infrastructure impacts from transportation that may have affected National Park Units in the area. NPS staff worked with State of Utah and Bureau of Land Management to arrive at a fair market value for the leases.

HEADS UP

EXOTICS TEAMS A request for proposals for exotic plant management teams (EPMTs) is expected to be forwarded to the regions the week of November 29. The teams, based on the model of the team at Lake Mead funded with project funds, will be funded through a portion of the \$3.5 million FY 2000 increase for an exotic and native species management program.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANS A memorandum from the Associate Directors for natural and cultural resources on resource management plans is expected out the week of November 29. The memo will suspend the requirement for an RMP for FY 2001 project funding, and will suspend the RMP database update for 2000. The suspensions are during a transition to a new database and new guidance only; RMP

requirements will be reinstated the following year.

NRAG MEETING NOTES As promised in the last monthly report, the minutes of the last Natural Resource Advisory Group meeting are attached.

NATURAL RESOURCE CHALLENGE UPDATE The monthly report will contain a new feature, as recommended by the Natural Resource Advisory Group. The first, and therefore lengthy, update, appears at the bottom of this report.

NATURAL RESOURCE ADVISORY GROUP Minutes from the meeting in Santa Fe, promised in the last monthly report, are attached.

MEETINGS, TRAINING, AND OUTREACH

NPS AIR QUALITY SUMMIT: A servicewide air resource management planning meeting was held in Estes Park, Colorado, November 16-18.

Park air quality and natural resource specialists, regional air quality coordinators, and Air Resource Division staff shared information about air quality conditions and trends, recent legal and regulatory developments, current research activities, and park projects to reduce pollution within parks. The meeting also provided an opportunity to discuss the air quality action plan being developed for the Natural Resource Challenge. Presentations from meeting will be posted on the ARD intranet site shortly.

INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT SCHOOL PROGRAMS In the past few months the Integrated Pest Management program has presented five learning sessions about insects to elementary and pre-school groups in Washington D.C. and Lindenhurst New York. The program has also received a user friendly tarantula from the Smithsonian Insect Zoo as a teaching assistant.

The IPM staff reviewed and edited the revised Boy Scout Merit badge to include ecological principles for entomology.

A section on resource restoration and damage recoveries

under the
provisions of the National Park System Resources
Protection Act
was presented by the ERPA unit of the Environmental
Quality
Division to the Intermountain Regional Chief Rangers
Conference at
Park City, Utah.

PUBLICATIONS

AIR POLLUTION AND SNOWMOBILES: A paper entitled "An In-Use
Snowmobile Emission Survey in Yellowstone National Park"
was
recently published in Environmental Science & Technology
(Vol. 3,
No.21, pp. 3924-3926). The paper describes the results
from a
field study using remote sensing devices conducted between
February
and March 1998. A limited number of copies of the paper
are
available from John Ray, ARD (303-969-2820). On a related
matter,
the ARD is revising a paper prepared on Air Quality
Concerns
Related to Snowmobile Usage (October 1999) in response to
comments
received and to correct a few errors. The THIRD ANNUAL
PRIMENET
MEETING HELD AT SEQUOIA NP

Sixty NPS representatives, EPA cooperators and researchers
from USGS
and universities met in Sequoia NP in early November to
report on
progress under the Park Research and Intensive Monitoring
of
Ecosystems network (PRIMENet). Highlights included the
completion of
air and UV monitoring equipment installations at all 14
park sites.
We also held on evening workshop on the amphibian/UV field
project
begun in summer 1999, and to be continued at six PRIMENet
parks in
summer 2000. The group ended the three-day meeting with a
discussion of options for increasing researcher interest
in working
at this network of parks. The next gathering will be held
in
Shenandoah NP in November 2000. The paper is expected to
be
republished within the next few weeks.

GEORGE WRIGHT FORUM PUBLISHES PAPERS FROM NPS-SPONSORED SYMPOSIUM:

The George Wright Forum, Vol. 16, No. 3, contains the
papers
regarding NPS animal management policies that were
presented at the

1997 meeting of The Wildlife Society. Together, these papers explore existing NPS animal management policies from both Service and park viewpoints; emphasize that there are more types of animals in parks than the large, charismatic "wildlife"; discuss the importance of considering vegetation, ecosystems, and past events in considerations of animal management in parks; explore the relationship of values and science in policy formulation and discuss who makes policy and in what manner; and emphasize the need for partnership between park animal management and animal management in the larger landscapes that contain the parks.

SUMMARY OF CHALLENGE ACTION STATUS

1. Distribution and Outreach
- Announced at Centennial of Mt. Rainier National Park; speech available on the internet.
- Public Information Officers are coordinating their efforts and identifying stories that demonstrate the "challenge" issues.
- The action plan was distributed in August to all parks and regional offices. A list of 65 national NGOs has been developed and the action plan will be distributed to them when the transmittal memo is approved.
- A "popular" brochure or other material on the reason why expanded natural resource efforts are needed is still planned.
Harper's Ferry Center staff assisted in producing drafts.
- A press breakfast was held at the National Press Club on October 25, with Deny Galvin, Mike Soukup, Doug Morris, Don Neubacher, and Stan Albright. About 15 reporters attended the informal forum about the Challenge.

2. FY 2000 Budget

| | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|
| Request | Appropriated |
| I&M Program | \$7.5 million |
| Exotic & Native Species Mgt | \$3.5 million |
| NRPP | \$3 million |
| Geologic Expertise | \$0.735 million |
| Resource Protection Act/19jj | \$0 |
| California Desert | \$0 |

3. FY 2001 Budget

A request was made to the Department, and subsequently

forwarded to

the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), that would implement the

second year of a planned 5-year average of \$20 million/year annual

Challenge increase. This information will be publicly distributed

once the FY 2001 budget is made public.

4. Actions Underway When Challenge Approved

- Integrated needs tracking, including integration of PMIS/OFS and

RMP software: Proceeding with the help of a contractor, with a

target date for completion of October 2000. Memo to the field

explaining status and interim RMP database requirements has been

signed and distributed.

- Improve GPRA water goal: Completed.

- Implement Environmental Leadership Program: Lead reporting to

Deny Galvin appointed; Natural Resources working cooperatively to

implement; meeting of NRSS and ELI held at the end of November.

- Sabbatical-in-the-Parks Program: Design completed and approved;

final material being developed.

- Revise research and collecting permits: The public comment

period, which utilized the Federal Register process, recently

closed. Once comments are responded to, will need OMB clearance

(the public comment period was part of getting such clearance).

Prototype software was developed in FY 1999 to support administration of research permits via the Internet. The software

is not ready for full implementation yet. Additional work is

needed to integrate the IAR and permit software. Project funding

has been requested for this purpose.

5. For Immediate Action

- Resource Careers: All staff work completed on PDs, guidance,

etc.. Web site has been developed. A memorandum formally transmitting material to the field is in the surname process. Once

the memorandum is signed, it may take some additional time to put

the material on CD- ROMs for distribution to the field. It will be

available immediately on the Intranet, however.

- Recruitment Strategy: No concrete work to date; NPS recruitment

brochure just being finalized.

- Resources on park internet pages: Lissa Fox from

Natural

Resources Information Division is working with Information and Telecommunications Center (ITC) and will be developing draft material based on available documents for review by parks.

- Video on Organic Act: No action to date; will be examining whether appropriate for inclusion in video for 2000 general meeting, Discovery 2000.

- Set up 32 monitoring networks: Networks proposed by NRSS and reviewed and revised by regions.

- Develop and post list of T&E and exotic species: NPSpecies

database structure and software are nearly developed and more than 150 parks have sent species lists that have been converted to the new database. However, only about 80 of these have provided documentation such as voucher specimens and reports; park staff finding time to complete this task is a difficult obstacle to overcome. Any data sent by parks in any format will be entered into the new database, however. John Kartesz has completed a first draft of documented plant lists for about 60 parks. Plan to integrate T&E data from TNC with that database. A T&E coordinator is now on board and plans are to hire an additional T&E specialists once FY 2000 funding for a new biological resources division is available. Improved access to and ability to update T&E information, including that in NR-MAP and PMDS (GPRA database) being evaluated.

- Revise NR-MAP: Plans being made for workshops during the first part of the calendar year to address allocation tables in FY 2000. In conjunction with implementation of Synthesis data access tool by NRSS, examining using Synthesis for park NR-MAP profile data. This will facilitate updating data.

- Use of science emphasized in Strategic Plan guiding principles: Not yet addressed.

- Revise planning guidance: "Interim" RMP guidance drafted and in review by group of those who have worked with Kathy Jope on this issue. A review by the Natural Resources Advisory Group is being completed. Concurrence by Cultural Resources is still

needed. A

new DO specific to RMPs is being developed (DO-73). The final

version of the RMP guidance work-in-progress will be a Reference

Manuel to this DO.

6. Other Actions

- A memorandum soliciting proposals for Learning Centers has been

prepared and will be transmitted shortly.

- The component action plans that were used to formulated the

overall action plan will be revised and serve as more detailed

implementation plans. A draft revised plan is completed and being

transmitted to goal leaders to serve as a model for updating the

original proposed component action plans. The revised component

plans will bring the proposals in line with the adopted action plan

and will serve as detailed plans for specific parts of the Challenge.

7. Future Direction

- Stan Albright has been appointed as an advisor to the Director on

implementing the Challenge.

- The NRI steering committee has steered the Challenge through the

development phase. A Superintendents Council is proposed to help

with the implementation phase. A role and function statement has

been prepared. The NLC will discuss this the week of December 6.

Natural Resource Advisory Group
Meeting of October 26 & 27, 1999
Santa Fe, NM

Attendees:

Field

Judy Gottlieb, Alaska NRAG member, ARD
Steve Martin, Alaska NRAG member, Supt, DENA
Alex Carter, Alaska SO, Alaska NRAG substitute for previous meetings
Kathy Jope, Pacific West NRAG member, Seattle SO
Jay Goldsmith, Pacific West SO, for Pacific West NRAG member Andy Ringold , REDW
Frank Deckert, Intermountain NRAG member, Supt., CAVE
Steve Petersburg, Intermountain NRAG member, DINO RM
Skip Ladd, Intermountain ARD
Barbara West, Midwest NRAG member, Supt., VOYA
Julie van Stappen, Midwest NRAG member, APIS RM
Bob Krumenaker, Northeast DARD, substituting for Northeast NRAG member Bob McIntosh, ARD (first third of meeting only)
Doug Morris, Northeast NRAG member, Supt. SHEN
Mel Poole, National Capital NRAG member, Supt. CATO
Pat Toops, National Capital SO
John Yancy, Southeast ARD

Dick Sellars, from the Santa Fe Office, and Rick Harris, of the Strategic Planning Office, also attended portions of the meeting.

WASO

Mike Soukup, AD, NRSS (last two-thirds only)
Abby Miller, DAD, NRSS
Chris Shaver, Chief, ARD
Sarah Bransom, EQD
Dave Shaver, Chief, GRD
Rich Gregory, NRID
Gary Mason, NSMO
Dan Kimball, Chief, WRD

NEXT MEETING will be held at the National Conservation Training Center at Shepardstown, WVA the week of March 6.

Recommendation Summary

1. Memorandum to regional directors with proposed role and function statement for NRAG should be forwarded
2. Proposal to suspend Resource Management Plan requirements for FY 2001 funding should be adopted, but without the complicating nuances included in the proposed memorandum.

3. With respect to proposed interim Servicewide RMP guidance, NRAG requests a copy of the draft proposed guidance before it is circulated for Servicewide review. Some NRAG members felt that the guidance should present an option for a minimum approach for linking the strategic plans goals and the RMP to avoid having two standards for RMPs within a short period of time, since revisions are anticipated in the next two or three years. Kathy Jope's August ccMail note provides a clear summary of changes between the current proposed guidance and the RMP guidance currently in force. It should be mailed with the proposed guidance to NRAG for further thoughts on whether the interim guidance is going the right direction.
4. There is no problem with moving the lead for GIS in NPS to the Information and Telecommunications Center to improve Servicewide GIS program and data integration. However, funding for a Natural Resources GIS coordinator should be retained and funding control, as proposed, retained in Natural Resources. There are still details to be worked out about administration of funding, as some of the issues were included in written material but not explicitly addressed and different members left the meeting with different assumptions about the results.
5. WASO should make use of the work groups established to develop Challenge Action Plans in implementing the Challenge. A particular need at this point is input for establishing the new biological division. A few persons from the exotic and the native species group should be selected to help advise on issues and priorities for the new division and the exotics group should help elaborate plans for implementing the exotics teams.
6. The new Superintendents Council to oversee the Challenge implementation should approve all of the anticipated revised component action plans.
7. In general, for implementation of Challenge efforts for which there is no logical office, WASO should engage in more use of detail detail assignments to augment current capabilities. Networks of parks should also be addressing Learning Centers that might work for their networks.
8. It was suggested that there be a special section of the monthly reported devoted to Challenge implementation and that this be posted directly to the Director's bulletin board and sent to Public Information Officers.
9. The NEPA group set up by the NLC should consider a procedure for review of NEPA cases modeled after those which already exist for wildland fire, law enforcement, and loss control. The review objectives be geared to improving the underlying causes of problems, rather than emphasizing a punitive approach.
10. Concern was expressed about how changes in USGS will affect the NPS and a recommendation made that SAC meet with USGS to discuss this as soon as possible, with John Dennis to make arrangements.
11. NRAG recommended a subgroup, with WASO staff, be set up to pursue further ideas about implementation of the natural resource-related provisions of the National Parks Omnibus Management Act of 1998 (Thomas bill), principally Title II. The group consists of Steve Martin, Kathy Jope, Sarah Bransom, and Carol McCoy (GRD, not at meeting).
12. For purposes of determining small park funding allocation by region, it was recommended that small parks be those that are independently managed, as evidenced by having a separate RMP. Regions would be free to consider whether exceptions are valid for allocation of the funds within their regions.

13. For all Natural Resource fund sources that are competed, it was recommended that NRSS approve only new starts that can be funded in the current year, plus a few alternates in case an approved project cannot be implemented, with the balance sent back to recompet. A pool of NRPP resource management projects twice the amount of anticipated available funding should be solicited. The Washington Office should evaluate Jay Goldsmith's analysis and proposal for this.

Discussion

NRAG Structure and Charter The group discussed an issue from the previous meeting, which involved approval of proposed memo to regional directors with charter (these were sent to the group in advance). There was limited discussion and the memo will be forwarded. . It was confirmed that, as the NRAG Role & Function states, SAC is a subgroup of NRAG, focusing specifically on BRD and other research, on an as-needed basis.

RMPs Gary Mason updated NRAG on new software being considered to address RMP-related database needs not addressed by PMIS and OFS. There are five major components of the old RMP software. Following is what will be done with each of them:

Project proposals - PMIS

Base increase proposals - OFS

Reports on use of existing FTEs and funding - not yet determined

Accomplishment reporting - not yet determined

Archiving - not yet determined

An NPS contractor is examining the old RMP software to assess the needs of Natural and Cultural Resource programs, including potential database linkages, and identifying what requirements cannot currently be met. The contractor will also be interviewing users. Findings will be presented to a work group (involving diverse people) in mid-December or early January. WASO will send a request to Regions, inviting their nominations to this group. The intent is to have whatever software is needed completed by July. Note: PMIS is being modified to allow progress/completion reports.

A proposed memorandum eliminating the RMP requirement for FY 2001 Servicewide natural resource funding (sent in advance) was reviewed. Changes were requested to make it simpler. The NRAG agreed with the proposal to temporarily suspend the RMP requirement. It was emphasized that whether or not a park decides to revise an RMP during this period, there will be no adverse consequences to the park. Any new RMP, even if it follows the "old" guidance, will be valid for 4 years.

There was substantial discussion of the anticipated changes to the RMP and RMP process that may result from the changes in the DO-2 planning process envisioned by the Challenge. Kathy Joje has drafted interim guidance that looks forward to, or sets a course toward, such changes, but will need to be revised once the overall planning process is revised. The Joje guidance is proposed as a reference manual to an as yet unwritten DO on RMPs. Some NRAG members felt that this approach might confuse parks, though few had seen the proposed guideline. They were

concerned that it could make it more difficult, rather than easier, for parks, and recommended that any interim approach be posed more in terms of quick fixes to the old guidance or options. Most members agreed that a key objective for the guidance should be to strengthen the ties between the RMP and park strategic plans and annual work plans, as well as GMPs. NRAG requests a copy of the draft proposed guidance before it is circulated for Servicewide review. Kathy Jope's August ccMail note provides a clear summary of changes between the current proposed guidance and the RMP guidance currently in force. It should be mailed with the proposed guidance to NRAG for further thoughts on whether the interim guidance is going the right direction.

GIS Coordination Proposal The group discussed the proposal forwarded in advance of the meeting. Rich Gregory reported the reaction of the GIS coordinators, which was generally favorable, but with a strong suggestion that there be a Natural Resource GIS coordinator as well. NRAG asked that it be made clear that data management, including GIS, is a major underfunded and growing need of Natural Resources. Questions arose about changes in funding. Abby indicated that the proposal is that the ITC coordinator administer the funding in the same manner that it is currently administered, but any changes to the way the funds are allocated and administered would need to be approved by NRAG. NRAG generally agreed with the GIS coordinators, not minding the ITC coordination role, but requesting that the position for a Natural Resource GIS coordinator, and funds for the position, be retained. They suggested that FY 2000 be treated as a transition year, so perhaps ITC would not need to pick up funding until FY 2001, with Leslie transferred in FY 2000, though her position would continue to be funded by Natural Resources for the year. In this case, Natural Resources would not be able to backfill behind Leslie until FY 2001.

Natural Resource Challenge Abby Miller reviewed the status of the Challenge, including the first two year budgets. Mike Soukup and Doug Morris reported on events and plans and needs surrounding the Natural Resource Challenge. Mike and Doug, along with Stan Albright, Deny Galvin and Don Neubacher, participated in a briefing for about 15 press representatives on October 25. The details of Stan Albright's role in helping to advise on the Challenge are not yet worked out. Mike indicated that the current Steering Committee, having successively steered the Challenge to its announcement and action plan, would be replaced with a steering committee made up primarily of superintendents, with a larger number than the current committee. This is because so much of the implementation, particularly the underlying focus and emphasis, is dependent on superintendents.

Abby Miller asked if NRAG members would forward any examples of "model" programs toward which public affairs staff could direct press interest. Steve Martin indicated that Denali is preparing a press release that described how it will be implementing the Challenge and what difference the Challenge will make to the park.

WASO should make use of the work groups established to develop Challenge Action Plans in implementing the Challenge. A particular need at this point is input for establishing the new biological division. A few persons from the exotic and the native species group should be selected to serve as an advisory board as the division is established. The exotic group should help elaborate plans for implementing the exotics teams. In general, for implementation of Challenge efforts for which there is no logical office, WASO should engage in more use of

details. Networks of parks should also be addressing Learning Centers that might work for their networks.

In discussing how to provide information to the field about implementation of the Challenge, it was suggested that there be a special section of the monthly reported devoted to Challenge implementation and that this be posted directly to the Director's bulletin board and sent to Public Information Officers.

SUWA/Unique/Essential Resources Chris Shaver summarized the implications of the Southeast Utah Wilderness Alliance lawsuit. The opinion in that case was that the NPS does not have authority under its Organic Act to impair "unique" park resources. The Departments of the Interior and Justice filed an appeal to clarify the language and pledged that guidance on the Organic Act would be forthcoming in new management policies. The NRSS has been involved in efforts to assure that resulting language in Chapter 1 of the new Management Policies is appropriate for providing broad resource protection. This has involved intensive meetings among representatives of the Assistant Secretary's Office, the Office of the Solicitor, the Office of Policy, and NRSS. When language has been resolved, the management policies will go out for public review.

NLC NEPA Group and "Thomas bill" implementation At the last NRAG meeting, considerable attention was devoted to a spate of recent court case losses by NPS on NEPA grounds. The NRAG suggested that the NLC address the issue. As a result, Jake Hoogland, Mike Soukup and Solicitor Dave Watts made a presentation to the last NLC meeting. The NLC was impressed by the gravity of the situation and established a small work group to develop possible solutions. The group includes Mike Soukup, Bill Schenk, John Reynolds, and Ron Everhart (who may be replaced by Karen Wade). Mike asked NRAG for ideas the group should pursue, particularly on ways to reconcile/adjudicate different professional positions on parks' staff. The Environmental Quality Division has drafted brochures summarizing recent court cases and the lessons to be learned from them. The NRAG thought these brochures useful.

The discussion of the NEPA effort and the implementation of the Thomas bill became somewhat entwined, as the key issue has become how to implement the "decision-making" portion (sec. 206) of the Omnibus National Parks Management Act of 1999. Mike raised the issue of whether regulations were needed; there were some strong views from NRAG members that this was not the appropriate approach. The NEPA group set up by the NLC, and any follow up on the "Thomas bill," should consider an NPS-9 model for review of NEPA cases, i.e., use of review panels that are not aimed at being punitive, but geared to improving the underlying causes of problems. The group also discussed the importance of resource managers improving efforts to analyze impacts and not depend on the threat of lawsuits. Better analysis, in combination with Thomas bill implementation, can lead to more resource-friendly decision making that leaves the management decisions with NPS, not the courts. A subgroup of the NRAG, with WASO staff, was set up to pursue further ideas about Thomas bill implementation. It consists of Steve Martin, Kathy Jope, Sarah Bransom, and Carol McCoy (GRD, not at meeting). Mike had also considered funding a detail to handle this task, but the need for such a detail will now depend on what the smaller group is able to come up with before the March meeting.

Discovery 2000 is the name of the general conference planned for September 2000 (also referred to by some as the “superintendents conference.” Mike Soukup told NRAG that E.O. Wilson would be a keynote speaker and that thirty breakout sessions would be devoted to future natural-resource related issues. He asked NRAG members to forward suggestions.

GPRA The GPRA Task Force is being replaced by Goal Groups established for each major category of goals. The Natural Resources Goal Group consists of Bob Barbee, Karen Wade, Mike Soukup, Paul Anderson, Ron Everhart, Rick Harris, Russ Galipeau, and others to be determined. Their purpose includes:

- Establish and ensure that we meet the goals
- Identify external factors that affect our ability to meet the goals
- Determine how to validate the data entered in PMDS. The IG is reviewing this in three parks. There will also be an internal review on how we implement performance management.

USGS Reorganization Concern was expressed about how changes in USGS will affect the NPS and a recommendation made that SAC meet with USGS to discuss this. John Dennis will find a time (as soon as possible) when appropriate USGS leadership can meet with SAC, so we can have input before their changes are firmed up. SAC is to report back to us in March.

Small parks An issue of concern to some is what is a small park. In particular, should legislatively distinct units that are managed by a large park superintendent and are not geographically distinct be eligible for small park funding (e.g., Glen Echo Park/Geo. Washington Parkway; John D. Rockefeller Parkway/Grand Teton NP; Fort Point/Golden Gate NRA). The NRAG recommended that for purposes of determining small park funding allocation by region, small parks be those that are independently managed, as evidenced by having a separate RMP. Regions would be free to consider whether exceptions are valid for allocation of the funds within their regions.

Panels for competitive projects—are they worth the cost? Abby had intended to bring data on the cost of panels for this discussion, but did not. There was general discussion that generally the panels are viewed as useful, for several reasons. Abby pledged to forward the data and to bring up the issue for further discussion only if members felt, after reviewing the data, that such a discussion is needed.

Other funding issues The NPS will be consolidating the timing on even more funding calls (beyond Natural Resources). In Natural Resources, NRAG recommended that we consolidate the calls for progress/completion reports.

Several concerns were raised regarding the NRPP call. We need to ensure that:

- There is an adequate pool of candidate projects
- We’re using NRPP funding to address the NPS’s highest-priority projects
- There is enough funding to fund the highest-priority needs each year.

In the past, new starts have been approved for out-years; all projects except the unacceptable ones have been approved for eventual funding. As a result, mediocre projects are approved for

funding, precluding some good projects from being submitted in the out-years. NRAG recommended that only new starts that can be funded in the current year, plus a few alternates, should be approved, with the balance sent back to recompet. Abby indicated that the Budget Office has been trying to get us to go the other direction, so that we could put a list of projects to be funded in the budget justification. She noted, however, that they failed to use the last list provided. Abby will coordinate with the Budget Office before any follow up on this recommendation. A pool of NRPP resource management projects twice the amount of anticipated available funding should be solicited. The Washington Office should evaluate Jay Goldsmith's analysis and proposal for this.

Data Synthesis Plan for Natural Resource Program Center Dave Shaver provided a brief overview of NRSS's plans to better integrate its data and to provide a tool for easier park access to natural resource data. Dave indicated that NRSS's internal team of data folks is to be expanded to include park personnel in an advisory role and asked for input on who should be asked. It was suggested that the data integration plan be sent to SOs and NRAG members.

Monitoring Networks There has been some confusion about the recent memorandum requesting inventory proposals based on the proposed 32 networks. Abby indicated that regions should assume the revisions they proposed are accepted for purposes of developing proposals.

Issues that need to be addressed The NRAG continues to have concerns about gathering of natural resources for Native American use and how the practice is being permitted. It was suggested that this be a major topic of the next meeting, with Pat Parker invited to speak. The following were put on the agenda for the March meeting:

- ❑ CESUs
- ❑ Thomas bill implementation progress
- ❑ 2-cycle engines
- ❑ Pat Parker and Native American gathering practices
- ❑ Updates on;
 - ❑ NEPA effort
 - ❑ New division
 - ❑ I&M networks
 - ❑ Challenge
 - ❑ Discovery 2000 (General Conference in Sept. 2000)