# The Background to
# Resources Management Plans
# in the National Park Service

Some parks have had some form of a Resource Management Plan (RMP) since the mid-1960s, but not every park had a plan and the plans were not consistent in content and format. Around 1980, several things caused the National Park Service to focus on improving it's resource management planning process.

## 1979

The National Parks and Conservation Association released a survey of resource problems in about 200 parks. Entitled the **Adjacent Lands Survey**, the survey attracted attention and was felt to be one reason Congress asked for the "State of the Parks" report.

## 1980

The **State of the Parks** report to Congress listed more than 4,000 threats to the aesthetic qualities, and the cultural and natural resources in units of the National Park System. The report also found that only about 25 percent of the threats were adequately documented and that only 1 of 3 parks had an approved RMP.

The **State of the Parks** report to Congress received considerable attention from the Congress, the press, conservationists and the public. It provided the Service with a new point of reference for doing something about threats to the resources. It made park employees more aware of the problems in their park and other parks. And it provided a catalyst for the Service to reaffirm its efforts in resources inventory, monitoring, research and management. In July 1980, Congress requested the Service to develop a prevention and mitigation plan that would address the problems noted in the **State of the Parks** report.

The **State of the Parks: Servicewide Strategy for Prevention and Mitigation of Natural and Cultural Resources Management Problems** was completed in December 1980 and was presented to Congress in January 1981. The strategy called for each park to have a comprehensive Resource Management Plan (RMP) approved by the end of 1981. The Resource Management Plans written in response to the Servicewide threat prevention/mitigation strategy were to

(1) include an inventory of park resources and a detailed program for monitoring and managing the resources,

(2) specify necessary staff and funding, and

(3)   assign priorities to projects so that resources
        provided could be allocated toward the most serious
        problems.

The plans were to be updated annually and used in formulating
annual NPS budgets beginning with fiscal year 1984.

**1987**

A GAO review of the Service's resource management program,
entitled **Limited Progress Made in Documenting and Mitigating
Threats to the Parks**, noted that some parks did not have an
approved RMP even though they were required to be completed by
the end of 1981, others had not updated their RMPs, parks were
generally not following consistent guidance in preparing RMPs,
and RMPs were generally not being used in formulating the
Service's budget.

To provide the information needed for the Service to develop
a comprehensive, systemwide approach to protect and manage
park resources and to provide the basis to make more informed
funding decisions, the 1987 GAO report recommended that the
National Park Service

- enforce the agency's requirement that Resource Management
  Plans be prepared and updated in accordance with
  established National Park Service guidance and criteria
  at each park and

- improve procedures on the use of the information provided
  in the Resource Management Plans to (1)  identify and
  prioritize cultural and natural resource management needs
  on a regional and Servicewide basis and (2) prepare
  annual budget requests.

The 1987 GAO report concluded that "Without complete, current,
and consistent RMPs and a process for using the RMP
information to prepare the agency's annual budget request and
make funding decisions, there has been no assurance the funds
received were used to address the most serious resource
management problems".

**1988**

The **Natural Resources Assessment and Action Program** (NRAAP)
report described Systemwide Action Programs being implemented
that included the revision of guidelines for park Resource
Management Plans to assure uniform resource status data and
tracking mechanisms to monitor expenditures and project
completion.

**1989**

In response to the 1987 GAO report and NRAAP, the Service issued revised instructions for RMPs in March 1989. These instructions were based on the consensus reached in a meeting of WASO and regional personnel. Under the revised instructions, parks are to update their RMP at least every 4 years. This means that all parks should have a RMP revised under the 1989 format by March 1993.

A Servicewide Resources Management Planning Course was held March 29-30, 1989.

A computer program developed by the Southeast Region was distributed to each park in 1989 as the first Resource Management Plan software.

**1990**

A Servicewide computer program that was based on, but enhanced the Southeast Region's program, was designed and distributed Servicewide.

**1991**

Beginning in FY1991 parks were asked to submit their annual RMP update report in automated form, using the RMP software. This information was submitted, via the regions, to WASO where it was compiled into a Servicewide automated information base.

**1992**

An Alternative Management Control Review (AMCR) of Park Resource Management Planning and Information was conducted. The AMCR found that most RMPs are being completed consistent in format with the revised (1989) instructions. Quality of RMPs is somewhat variable, however, particularly with regard to the level of detail provided in the RMP and the use of the RMP to formulate a resource management program for the park, as opposed to being only a collection of project statements.

The AMCR recommended that WASO track the status of all RMPs being updated in the revised (1989) format by March 1993, that WASO Natural and Cultural Resources coordinate on the development of Servicewide RMP training course(s), and that WASO issue guidance to encourage the Regions to provide first drafts of RMPs to WASO reviewers for informal review early in the update process.