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GEOLOGIC RESOURCES DIVISION - NATURAL RESOURCES PROGRAM CENTER

Quarterly Report: January-March 1998 --

Part I

#### GENERAL

SERVICEWIDE PROJECT FUNDING AVAILABLE AT LAST FOR THE ABANDONED MINERAL LANDS PROGRAM -- For the first time, in FY-98 Servicewide monies exist for the NPS to fund park specific Abandoned Mineral Lands (AML) reclamation and mitigation projects. The Division first initiated annual AML budget requests in 1986. However, no request cleared NPS/DOI until this year, and Congress appropriated only one-third of the requested amount. In FY-98, the NPS will fund up to \$250,000 of park AML projects. While a relative drop in the bucket, the appropriation is a start in addressing the Service's extensive AML backlog. Existing data indicates that 146 parks contain over 3,800 mines, 11,000 underground openings, and 33,000 acres of surface area disturbed by mining. This year's funding will go to regional priority projects that are ready-to-go (e.g., design, compliance, etc.). Generally these projects are among the "Top 100" AML priority list. The long-term plan for FY-99 and beyond is to fund projects through a competitive proposal process similar to the process governing the allocation of project funds in Natural Resources (e.g., NRPP, Water Resources, etc.). If you have questions about funding or technical assistance for AML projects, contact Dave Steensen at 303-969-2014.

DIVISION AND PARKS UPDATE MINERALS DATA -- The Division recently invited parks to review and update printouts of data used to track in-park hardrock mining operations, oil and gas development, NPS administrative sand and gravel sites, and trans-park oil and gas pipelines. The updated information will be placed in summary form on the Internet for use by the general public. The raw data will be posted on the Intranet in order to give parks the opportunity to use, check, and update the data as necessary. At the park level, the data will be beneficial to park planning and management. At the national level, the data will be used to define the scope of mineral development operations and resource threats in parks, identify abandoned site and disturbed land needs, justify funding proposals for NPS minerals management staffing and training, and provide answers to executive, judicial, and congressional inquiries. (Geniac)

AUTHORITY EXISTS TO REQUIRE OPERATORS TO HIRE 3RD PARTY MONITORS OF 3-D SEISMIC OPERATIONS -- The Division, in consultation with the Santa Fe Regional Solicitor's office, has determined that regulatory authority exists for parks to require nonfederal oil and gas operators intending to conduct 3-D seismic work in parks to hire 3rd parties to monitor operations. 3-D seismic operations present a unique challenge to the NPS. Such operations typically run 7 days a week, 12 hours a day, up to 9 months at a time and cover surface areas an order of magnitude greater than conventional seismic. Providing for adequate monitoring of these operations will be a key component of submitted plans. At the park level, the NPS lacks the staff and needed expertise to monitor such operations. Because of these constraints, several parks in Texas and the Big Cypress National Preserve in Florida asked the Division to look into the possibility of getting the operators to bear the burden of monitoring such operations rather than the NPS. Detailed guidance to the field on this topic will be distributed shortly. (Kassman)

SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL DRAFT PROPOSED REVISIONS RECEIVE FAVORABLE PARK RESPONSE -- The Division recently circulated draft proposed revisions to 36 CFR 26.7, which govern disposal of solid wastes generated from mineral operations in park units,

to a group of park and regional staff. The focus of the draft revisions is to streamline the existing regulations, and to clarify that non-hazardous waste rock can be used on-site for reclamation purposes and in the interim can be left on-site. The existing language unintentionally required the immediate removal of all extracted material from mine sites in parks. Such a requirement is burdensome to operators and creates an impediment to site reclamation. The reviewing group commented that the draft proposed revisions achieved the objective. The Division is now working with Ranger Activities and the Solicitor's Office in preparing the requisite rulemaking package to publish the proposed revisions in the Federal Register for public comment. (Brunner)

WORKSHOP FOR INTERAGENCY CAVE COORDINATORS SET FOR MAY -- The Division will host an interagency workshop of national cave coordinators from May 19 to the 21st in Denver. The objectives are to develop a final version of an interagency agreement for cave and karst management; draft national cave cartographic survey and safety standards; discuss the need for national cave and karst protection and conservation standards; and discuss the possible establishment of a National Cave and Karst Research Institute. (Kerbo)

DIVISION PARTICIPATES IN BIENNIAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION OF PARTNERS FOR PUBLIC LANDS (formerly the Conference of National Park Cooperating Associations) -- The Division participated in the Association's biennial meeting in Gatlinburg, Tennessee on March 16 through the 20th. The NPS Geology booth was very well received with a steady stream of visitors during the two 9-hour exhibit days. A recent article in the Association's journal, The Exchange, sparked high interest in the NPS's geologic resources program, along with an on-going survey of association bookstores. Many associations are interested in supporting the NPS geologist-in-the-parks program, in helping to locate geology authors and publications, and listing their geology book selections on the Park Geology website. Working with the associations should prove rewarding to natural resource management and the public through expanded book selections and development of new materials. Association employees and bookstores are frontline contact points in many parks and the major source of literature available to visitors. (Wood)

DIVISION COMMENCES DRAFT PROPOSED REVISIONS TO MANAGEMENT POLICIES -- In a memorandum dated February 27, 1998, the Director asked that draft proposed revisions to the NPS Management Policies be submitted to the WASO Office of Policy no later than June 30, 1998. In keeping with this timeframe, the Division is focused on revising the geology resource sections, which includes paleontological resources, at Chapter 4:19; the minerals sections at Chapter 8:12-14; and the section on in-park use of borrow pits and spoil areas at Chapter 9:4. The Division will obtain input from a list of field reviewers before submitting any suggested revisions to the Office of Policy. If you would like to be included on the list of reviewers for minerals or geology, please contact the following individuals, respectively: Eddie Kassman at (303) 969-2146 and Julia Brunner at (303) 969-2012. Once all the proposed revisions to the NPS Management Policies are compiled the Office of Policy intends to put the document out for a 60-day internal NPS review. (McCoy)

DRAFT GUIDANCE DOCUMENT ON USE OF BORROW IS IN THE WORKS -- In conjunction with the Denver Service Center, the Division has revised and converted Special Directive 91-6 on the use of in-park sources of sand and gravel to the new Directives System. The proposed revision emphasizes the need for parks to develop park-wide plans before commencing or continuing in-park extraction. The Division plans on circulating the draft guidance to interested park and regional staff in the near future. (Brunner)

DIRECTOR MEETS WITH DIRECTOR OF OSM TO DISCUSS OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE THE PROTECTION OF PARKS FROM SURFACE COAL MINING -- On January 20th, the Director met with the Director of the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSM) to discuss ways to improve the park protection aspects of OSM regulations and that agency's oversight of state delegated programs. Under the

federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 states may assume responsibility for administering surface coal mining within their boundaries provided their regulations are consistent with federal requirements. In important aspects that affect park protection, the federal regulations are silent or provide little direction to states on how to implement the federal statute. For example, while a provision of the Act prohibits surface coal mining that will adversely affect parks unless jointly approved by the regulatory authority and agency with jurisdiction over the park, no guidance exists at the federal level for interpreting and applying the pivotal phrase, "adversely affect." As a result, states may too narrowly construe the meaning of the phrase or totally ignore it thus never triggering this particular park protection provision of the Act. While no issues were resolved at the meeting, the meeting served to initiate a dialogue at the highest levels of each agency. (McCoy)

#### INTERMOUNTAIN REGION

MEETING HELD IN UTAH TO DISCUSS PROTECTION OF THE STATE'S WATERSHEDS -- The technical team of the Utah "Interdepartmental Abandoned Mine Lands Watershed Clean-up Initiative" met in Salt Lake City in February to discuss options for achieving on the ground results in 1998. At the meeting, the BLM identified the need to produce a list of potential sites sometime in early March. Based on an earlier meeting, the technical team has narrowed the list of potential sites to several areas throughout Utah. None of the sites directly affect park units, although some are in areas upstream of Glen Canyon National Recreation Area. The NPS has some background water quality data for Glen Canyon, but has not yet determined whether water quality degradation in the park is related to previous mining. To improve the effectiveness of its participation on the technical team, the NPS needs to enhance its understanding of the impact of mine sites in the state on park resources. (Steensen)

COMPANY SEEKS TO EXPAND GAS DEVELOPMENT OUTSIDE BIG THICKET -- The Division has been working on an issue with Mariner Energy regarding their future gas development plans just north of the Beaumont Unit of the Big Thicket National Preserve. The company holds lease rights in and adjacent to the park. Mariner has directionally drilled a successful well from outside the park to a bottom hole location in the park and is proposing to run a gathering line across the park. Mariner holds three additional leases that straddle the northern boundary of the park's Beaumont Unit. Mariner raised the following issue: if there are straight hole wells drilled on the portion of the leases located outside the park, would the NPS permit Mariner to run the gas through the gathering line that crosses the park? In consultation with the Regional Solicitor's Office, our current position is that Mariner can run gas through the gathering line if the company can demonstrate that part of the production unit associated with those leases is located inside the park. The Division views this strategy as benefiting both the park and the developer. For the park, having the company extract oil and gas in the park from well locations outside the park minimizes immediate surface disturbance to park resources and lowers the risk of future park resource degradation. From the Mariner's perspective, although its operations are still subject to NPS regulatory requirements at 36 CFR 9B, it may qualify for regulatory exemptions thus lowering the company's overhead costs. (Kassman)

#### MIDWEST REGION

DIVISION SEEKS REIMBURSEMENT FOR FOIA REQUEST -- In January, the Division received a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request from an attorney in Boise, Idaho requesting that we produce documents related to the NPS's ongoing concerns over lead mining adjacent to Ozark National Scenic Riverways. As part of standard FOIA procedure, the Division prepared a cost estimate of \$4,000 to search, review, copy and assemble the requested information. For requests that are over \$250 or where the requestor has a history of non-payment, the government can request prepayment before producing documents. Until the

requestor responds to the cost-estimate and forwards the appropriate sum, the government does not have to commence the process of copying documents. In responding to the FOIA request, the Division has been working closely with Jack O'Brien. Jack works in the Intermountain Regional Office and is extremely knowledgeable about compliance with FOIA. As Jack often says, "It's the freedom of information act, not the free information act." (Kassman)

DEPARTMENTAL DECISION IMMINENT ON LEAD EXPLORATION PERMITS ADJACENT TO OZARK NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAYS -- Ozark National Scenic Riverways and the surrounding area is nationally renown for its pristine waters, karst geology and associated complex hydrogeologic system. Big Spring, located within the park's boundary, is a nationally significant karst spring and one of the largest in the United States. The Doe Run Company has applied to the BLM for 5 prospecting permits to explore for lead on the Mark Twain National Forest 16 miles from the park's boundary and in the heart of Big Spring's groundwater recharge zone. In consultation with the USGS, the Division and the NPS's Water Resources Division has determined that the effects to park resources from full-scale lead mining in this area could be devastating.

The BLM and the FS have jointly prepared an EA that only examines the environmental effects of exploration, deferring examination of the effects of full-scale mining until after the company has applied for a preference right lease. Well over half of the 3,000 public comments sent to the BLM/FS, including those submitted by the NPS, State Attorneys General for Missouri and Arkansas, EPA, FWS, and NPCA, objected to the issuance of the prospecting permits without first preparing an EIS that addresses the area's suitability for full-scale lead mining. The NPS and the public are concerned that under the existing regulatory scheme, exploration will vest the company with a legal right to a lease and the government will be faced with having to allow lead mining or buying out the lease right.

The Division has assisted the park in elevating the park protection concerns related to this matter to the Solicitor and to the Secretary of the Interior. Recently, the Division prepared a memo signed by the Director which recommends that the Department deny the pending prospecting permit applications and initiate a process to examine the permanent withdrawal of all federal minerals within the Big Spring recharge zone from future exploration and development. The Department is expected to make a decision on the permit applications by the end of April/early May. (Kassman)

DIVISION MAKES RECOMMENDATION TO PETRIFIED FOREST ON HOW TO OBLITERATE ABANDONED ROADS -- The Division transmitted a trip report to the park and region outlining the treatment options, special issues, and estimated costs associated with the permanent closure and restoration of priority abandoned backcountry roads. Park staff identified about 22 miles of roads not needed for visitor access, resource management, law enforcement, or other administrative activities. Ranchers and miners previously used most of these roads. The pervasive problem with the abandoned roads appears to be associated with soil compaction along the tire-tracks which has inhibited vegetative recovery. In most cases this problem can be corrected with relatively minor effort. Remediation of a borrow pit will require more intensive work. The total estimated cost ranges from \$29,400 to \$31,600. Petrified Forest intends to use Fee Demonstration funds for the restoration work. This supports the intent of the Fee Demonstration Program (e.g., one-time backlog projects), the Servicewide Strategic Plan Goal Ia1a (Restoration of Disturbed Lands), and, of course, the NPS Mission of preserving resources "unimpaired." (Steensen)

#### NORTHEAST REGION

CAPE COD ASKS WHETHER A LOCAL TOWN CAN REMOVE SAND FROM PARKING LOT -- Each year the park is tasked with the job of returning sand that has accumulated in parking lots back to the park's dunes and beach area. This year, in an effort to help defray park maintenance costs and gain some good will with the local



community, the park wondered whether it legally could let one of the local towns remove sand from a parking lot and keep the material for local use, such as, in play grounds. The park clearly stated that it would not entertain such a use if it would be adverse to park protection. The Division researched the question in coordination with the Solicitor's Office in Washington. Our research led us to conclude that no legal authority exists for doing so. The sand is government property and cannot be disposed of without explicit Congressional authority. At present, the only park where sand and gravel may be disposed of is at Lake Chelan National Recreation Area. In 1988, Congress amended that park's enabling statute to allow the park to sell park sand and gravel to local residents so long as "such sale and disposal does not have a significant adverse effect on the administration" of the park and the material is not removed from the wilderness portions of the park. (McCoy)

**NEW RIVER GORGE REQUESTS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO RECLAIM 8 ABANDONED MINE SITES**  
-- New River Gorge National River requested technical assistance to determine the appropriate reclamation of eight abandoned coal mine sites within the park. Division staff met with the park to discuss the Division's abandoned mine land program, appropriate closure methods, and possible funding for some of the park's abandoned mine land sites. Closure recommendations and costs are being prepared for six abandoned coal openings and two abandoned coal processing plants. All sites are near popular trails and represent a significant safety hazard to the public. A potential acid mine drainage site was identified at the Meadow Creek coal processing plant. Water from this site flows into a tributary creek of the New River. We believe that this 100-acre site was abandoned prior to completion of state-required reclamation. The park is in the process of determining water quality and the status of reclamation with the state's Office of Surface Mining. (Gese)

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Quarterly Report: January-March

1998 -- Part II

PACIFIC WEST REGION

APPROXIMATELY 300 UNPATENTED MINING CLAIMS EXIST IN DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK -- A complete review of BLM and NPS records, completed since the park's expansion by the California Desert Protection Act, indicate that the number of unpatented mining claims in Death Valley is now 292. Of these unpatented claims, 170 claims in 39 groups may need validity exams. Five claims are scheduled for validity examination beginning in April, and six claims have been examined and found valid. Eighty claims within the park are still in question as to annual filings, locations, etc., and may be voided administratively. (Covington)

DIVISION MEETS WITH DESERT AML SUBCLUSTER REPRESENTATIVES -- In February, the Division met with representatives from Death Valley, Joshua Tree, Lake Mead, and Mojave to discuss the goals and objectives of a Desert Region Abandoned Mine Land (AML) subcluster group. The group would share funds and technical expertise in order to address more effectively AML concerns in the subcluster. Gail Newton, AML Unit Manager, California Department of Conservation, also attended the meeting. The state is interested in developing a formal AML partnership with the NPS that would allow both agencies to share AML data, expertise, and funding. If a state bond issue passes this year, the state will have an additional \$10 million in AML funding. A cooperative agreement between the California Department of Conservation and the Pacific West Region is under development. Division and park staff also discussed the resources that each could contribute to the AML effort and what resources each park needed to mitigate and reclaim its AML sites. The Division committed to distribute meeting notes to attendees, develop an AML inventory form and uniform definitions, and to update National AML database over the coming year. (Gese)

DIVISION EVALUATES MINE PLAN FOR ACCESS THROUGH JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK -- In response to a park request, the Division staff evaluated the adequacy of a proposed plan of operations filed by First Class Miners Club. The plan proposes to use park-administered roads to access mining claims located outside the park. First Class Miners Club, which appears to be mainly a recreational group, intends to use only privately owned passenger vehicles such as pickup trucks, sport utility vehicles, and 4-wheel drive vehicles on NPS roads. Under NPS regulations, access related to a mining operation, even if the latter is of a recreational nature, triggers NPS regulations at 36 CFR Part 9, Subpart A. The Division advised the Superintendent that the plan failed to meet all the information requirements at 36 CFR 29.9(b), and recommended the plan not be accepted as "complete." Information lacking includes: the number of years access through the park is necessary, whether permanent structures will be constructed on the mining claims, demonstration of compliance with other applicable regulations, omission of an environmental report, and failure to discuss the relationship of the mine plan to NPS planning documents. (Woods)

CLAIMANT AT JOSHUA TREE SEEKS ACCESS TO SECURE INFORMATION NECESSARY TO COMPLETE PROPOSED PLAN OF OPERATIONS -- The Division assisted the park in assessing the options for allowing a claimant to access his mining claim to obtain information needed to complete a proposed plan of operations under NPS regulations at 36 CFR part 9, Subpart A. Unlike the Service's regulations governing nonfederal oil and gas regulations, the 9A regulations do not contain a specific provision for

authorizing access solely for the purpose of collecting basic information necessary to prepare a proposed plan of operations. Under both sets of regulations, a prospective operator must obtain NPS approval of a plan of operations before conducting surface disturbing activities within park boundaries. In coordination with the Washington Solicitor's Office, the Division advised the park that access could be granted under a special use permit via authority at 25.6(c) governing commercial vehicles. (McCoy)

CONTRACTS ARE IN THE WORKS TO DETERMINE WHETHER MINING CLAIMANTS HAVE VALID EXISTING PROPERTY RIGHTS IN THE CALIFORNIA DESERT PARKS -- The Division is working with the Administrative Program Center in Denver to hire contractors to help with the workload of determining whether unpatented mining claimants have valid existing property rights to mine in the three California desert parks. While all units of the National Park System are closed to the location of new mining claims, over a 1000 unpatented mining claims exist in Mojave National Preserve and Death Valley and Joshua Tree National Parks. These claims predate the establishment of the units and were staked under authority granted by the Mining Law of 1872. Under this Act, private entities can enter federal land and lay claim to certain minerals if they make a discovery of a valuable mineral. The process for assessing whether claimants hold valid property rights is known as a "validity examination." Via this well-established federal process, if the requisite discovery is lacking, the entity's asserted rights in a mining claim are deemed null and void. Validity examinations usually take up to a year to complete. Through the use of qualified contractors, the Division hopes to leverage its in-house capability to conduct such examinations in a timely manner. We hope to have 3 to 4 contractors on board by the end of the summer. (McCoy)

DIVISION MANAGERS MEET WITH CALIFORNIA DESERT PARK SUPERINTENDENTS TO DISCUSS MINING CLAIMS MANAGEMENT -- Division managers traveled to Las Vegas, Nevada on March 31 to meet with the superintendents and minerals management staff of Death Valley, Joshua Tree, and Mojave. The purpose of the meeting was to define the function of this management team, to provide an update on staffing progress for Division and Mojave mining claims management positions, to review and assess budget status relative to the Division's and Mojave's FY98 increases for mining operations management, and to share information on active and proposed mining operations. The management team will convene quarterly meetings and monthly teleconferences to ensure program coordination. The Division is moving ahead with staffing of four desert-based positions (i.e., two mineral examiners, one mining engineer and one geologist or environmental protection specialist) to provide technical support to all three parks. Mojave has hired an environmental compliance specialist, and intends to fill three more mining-related positions, including a hazardous material program manager, regulatory compliance specialist and a supervisory environmental protection specialists. Park managers will share a list of current and anticipated vacant positions to help potential dual career opportunities. (Woods)

POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE ANALYZES ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF SAND, ROCK AND GRAVEL EXTRACTION -- The Division is assisting Point Reyes develop a park Sand, Rock and Gravel Plan. Via the process of drafting the plan, the park will examine both past and present in-park extraction. It will determine whether use of existing sites is economical, environmentally sound, and in compliance with NPS policy as well as other Federal, State and local laws or requirements. To date the park has completed the following tasks: the development of an overall project plan, including a task list with assignments and deadlines; on-site inventories of extraction sites and sites in need of recontouring and restoration; mapping of extraction sites; conceptual plans for areas with a potential for continued extraction; restoration design and volume calculations for each site; and a comparison of the cost of extracting material from in-park sources versus purchasing material from external sources. Once complete, the Point Reyes plan, along with the park's analytical process, can serve as a good model for other parks to follow. If you would like more information, please contact Mark Ziegenbein at (303) 969-2957. (Ziegenbein)

## SOUTHEAST REGION

STATE OF KENTUCKY HEARING OFFICER RECOMMENDS REVOCATION OF SURFACE COAL MINING PERMIT ADJACENT TO CUMBERLAND GAP NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK -- In July 1997, the NPS filed an administrative appeal to the state's issuance of a surface coal mining permit to Appollo Fuels, Inc. adjacent to the park. The NPS based its appeal on the state's failure to engage the NPS in permitting the mine contrary to the federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977. Under that statute, if a proposed surface coal mine will adversely affect a public park or place on the National Registry of Historic Sites the permit must be jointly approved by the regulatory agency and the agency with jurisdiction over the affected park or place. Clear documentation exists that the mine will adversely affect the park's viewshed from a prominent park overlook. Thus, the state should have sought NPS approval of the permit. On January 20th, the Kentucky hearing officer presiding over the administrative appeal agreed and recommended that the head of the state Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Cabinet rescind the permit and engage the NPS in a joint approval process of the permit. Under Kentucky law, administrative hearing officers only have authority to make recommendations. They cannot directly overturn a decision of a state official but must seek to do so through state officials at a higher level. While the head of the cabinet has not yet acted on the recommendation, the NPS views the recommendation as a validation of the legitimacy of its concerns. In addition to the NPS, the National Parks and Conservation Association and the City of Middlesboro, Kentucky joined in the appeal to protect the park and the local community's water supply from the adverse effects of coal mining. (McCoy)

PROPOSED COAL MINE ADJACENT TO NATCHEZ TRACE PARKWAY RAISES PARK PROTECTION CONCERNS -- In January, staff from the Geologic, Air and Water Resources Divisions and the park submitted nearly 40-pages of comments on the preliminary draft environmental impact statement analyzing the proposed Red Hills Power Project adjacent to the park. The Tennessee Valley Authority prepared the preliminary draft. The environmental document failed to fully identify possible impacts to the project area from the proposed 4000-acre lignite strip mine and 400mw coal fired power plant. Further, the preliminary draft failed to offer a substantive analysis of possible impacts to Natchez Trace Parkway, which borders five miles of the proposed strip mine and lies adjacent to the power plant site.

Identifying the extent of impacts to park lands is a necessary outcome of the environmental process because federal and state law requires the protection of publicly owned parks from adjacent proposed surface coal mines. Under language contained in the federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977, which is mirrored in state law, the NPS has joint approval authority over surface coal mines that will adversely affect National Park System units. The Tennessee Valley Authority has stated their intent to release a draft version of the environmental impact statement in early February, and has not yet responded to Park Service comments. (Moss)

PROPOSERS OF THE RED HILLS POWER PROJECT MET WITH NPS STAFF -- In February, the Mississippi Lignite Mining Company conducted a tour of the proposed Red Hills Power Project site for members of the Geologic and Water Resources Divisions and Natchez Trace Parkway and Southeast Regional Support Office staff. The tour helped the NPS understand the physical setting of the proposed 4000-acre lignite strip mine and 400-mw power plant complex. If permitted by the State of Mississippi and the Tennessee Valley Authority, the proposed mine will parallel the park for 5 miles. In addition, the mining company conducted a tour of its South Hallsville Mine, a lignite strip mine, near Longview, TX. The NPS will apply the knowledge gained from the tours when commenting on the Tennessee Valley Authority's draft environmental impact statement for the project and the company's mining permit application filed with the State of Mississippi. (Moss)

DIVISION COMMENTS ON RED HILLS POWER PROJECT DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT -- In March, the Division commented on the draft environmental impact statement for the Red Hills Power Project. Overall, the draft EIS came up short



in addressing impacts to Natchez Trace Parkway from the adjacent proposed 5800-acre lignite strip mine and accompanying 400-mw power plant. The Tennessee Valley Authority, which prepared the document, failed to satisfactorily address in-park issues such as impacts on cultural or eligible sites, visual resources, night sky, noise, visitor and socioeconomic impacts that had been raised in NPS comments on the Preliminary Draft EIS. Combined comments from the Natural Resource Program Center and Natchez Trace Parkway totaled 47 pages. We hope the Tennessee Valley Authority will keep their promise to fully address NPS concerns between the draft and final versions of the environmental document. (Moss)

DIVISION EVALUATES MORE OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION PLANS FOR BIG CYPRESS -- The Division evaluated four more plans of operations for nonfederal oil and gas exploration in Big Cypress National Preserve, bringing the total number of proposed plans reviewed since last fall to seven. Collier Resources Company, the majority owner of private mineral rights in the preserve, has filed the plans in an effort to obtain approval to conduct 3D geophysical operations in the park and to drill an exploratory well. The Division's review of the plans revealed that each proposal failed to address the same informational requirements, and therefore recommended that the Superintendent not officially accept the plans as "complete" for formal review. In total, the proposed plans would cover 255 square miles of the park with 3D seismic operations that entail 2094 miles of source and receiver lines, 21,539 shot holes for dynamite detonation, 27 miles of all-weather access roads, and 92 acres of surface disturbance for pad construction to support seismic operations and the drilling of seven exploratory wells. This level of potential mineral development is raising significant policy and regulatory issues. The Preserve expects Collier Resources to submit additional exploration plans in the near future. (Woods)

#### DIVISION NEWS

USGS-DIVISION LIAISON RE-ESTABLISHED -- After a several month hiatus, the Geologic Resources Division has re-established a liaison position with the U.S. Geological Survey's Central Division. In the past, cooperative efforts between the two agencies have produced excellent research and information into the geology and hydrology of numerous parks. So far, discussions have centered on the following concepts or projects: Everglades and Yellowstone Ecosystems Initiative - a major initiative centered on the use of science in land management. Mojave Desert Ecosystem work is planned; USGS Intranet Site - a listing of available capabilities, expertise, and techniques; Scanning Electron Microscope Photographic Exhibit; Geologist In the Park Coordinator for USGS staff; Abandoned Mining Lands and associated Water Quality Maps for the western U.S.; Gila Cliff Dwelling Geology Interpretive Slide Show; development scenario for the Padre Island Minerals Management Plan; and a geologic field trip led by USGS experts for the staff of Mojave National Preserve. (Heise)

DIVISION EXPANDS KNOWLEDGE OF FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT -- During the last year, several minor Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests were made to the Division, prompting the Division to research the Act, pertinent Department of the Interior policies, and relevant case law. The Division also drafted a short guidance document to help all Natural Resource Program Center staff prepare for and respond to FOIA requests. As part of this effort, Division staff attended FOIA and Privacy Act training that was sponsored by the Office of Legal Education. The Division's redesign of its electronic filing system will also ease the burden of responding to large FOIA requests. Although implementation of the Division's FOIA responsibilities has been greatly assisted by the Intermountain Regional FOIA officer, the decentralized nature of the NPS necessitates that each office possess at least a rudimentary understanding of this statute. (Brunner)

NEW STAFF MEMBER TO MAINTAIN DATABASES -- Tim Connors has joined the staff as a student appointment. Tim has a M.S. degree in Geology along with a very pleasant personality. Tim will be mainly helping out with database management

and implementation. He also will be available for a wide variety of duties including, field support for mineral exams, office support for computers, and web page design and implementation.