

State of the Parks: Current Position

On Oct. 27, 1980, in a memo to his associate director for science and technology and his chief of the natural resources division, PNR Director Tobin announced establishment of a regional committee on threats to the parks (to be chaired by the deputy regional director), called for expansion of interagency contacts and cooperation, and made responsibility assignments aimed at funding the research, management and maintenance activities associated with resource threats in such a way as to avoid both duplications and omissions. Ro Wauer prepared the following capsule of "threats" history, from Congressional request to the current status of Service response. It is here presented as framework for regional response action.

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In July 1979, the House Subcommittee on National Park and Insular Affairs requested that the National Park Service undertake an overview of existing and potential activities and forces, emanating both from inside and outside park boundaries, which may be damaging or threatening to the natural and cultural resources of the National Park System. In response to that request the National Park Service, in May 1980, submitted to the Congress the findings of a study titled, "State of the Parks - 1980." The most significant findings in this study were that: (1) virtually no park, representing all sizes and use categories and types of ecosystems, was immune; (2) a surprising 75 percent of the 4,345 reported threats to park resources had been classified by onsite park observers as inadequately documented by either private or government research; and (3) the Service must significantly expand its research and resources

management capabilities to mitigate the current threats and to prevent further deterioration of park resources.

The report received considerable review and support by the press, conservationists, and the American public. It has provided a realistic data base on which to build a vitally needed program of resource problem prevention and mitigation. The Service has utilized this report in its justification for requesting additional allocation of funds and personnel. The data derived from the study have become baseline information for future data-gathering efforts and an NPS resources environmental index.

As a followup to this report, the House Subcommittee requested the Service to prepare a second report, explaining short- and long-range actions anticipated. In December 1980, the Service submitted a second report titled, "State of the Parks: A Report to Congress on a Servicewide Strategy for Prevention and Mitigation of Natural and Cultural Resources Management Problems." This report outlines a systematic program of threats prevention and mitigation to be implemented within the more than 320 units under NPS stewardship.

That strategy includes a program of park problem evaluation and ranking that begins with the development of Significant Resources Problems (SRP's) in every park and is followed by an upward evaluation to where the highest priority SRP's become the basis for the Service's natural and cultural resources FY 1983 budget submissions. Similar ranking will occur annually through the use of revised area Resources Management Plans. Revised Plan guidelines already have been completed and distributed to the field.
