

Resource Information Tracking System (RITS) Software Started

By Ro Wauer

Inadequate information is an extremely serious obstacle to sound planning and decision-making. It is even more serious when the protection of a nationally significant resource depends upon that information. And it is a gross malfeasance when significant information is available but can not be retrieved when necessary.

The demand for available information far exceeds the present capability of the National Park Service to provide it. This shortcoming affects every facet of management in the parks, regions and the central office. It leads to delays, redundancies in efforts and costs, increased paperwork, and errors that directly affect the very resources the Service is mandated to preserve.

Although the Service has initiated many well-conceived data-gathering projects, ranging from inventories to long-term environmental monitoring, the majority last only as long as the principal investigator remains on site; the products from these endeavors often are utilized only so long as the users know where to find readily the necessary information. Important and worthwhile information is often lost or forgotten because of its inaccessibility.

This problem of inadequate information flow was identified in the 1981 *State of the Parks Prevention/Mitigation Report*, a followup to the initial *State of the Parks - 1980 Report to Congress*. The *Prevention/Mitigation Report* outlined a strategy for threat identification, assessment, monitoring, and prevention and mitigation. This systematic approach begins with comprehensive Resources Management Plans (RMPs) required for every park unit. Each Plan must include a series of Project Statements that document all of a park's resource projects; they range in detail and importance from such housekeeping activities as vista-clearing or hazardous tree control to more serious problems of internal and external impacts to park values. The framework outlined in the *Prevention/Mitigation Report* encompasses an information management system, built upon the numerous Project Statements, and capable of tracking those activities throughout their existence, including all resultant reports. This information management system is RITS, A Resource Information Tracking System.

RITS will serve three major functions:

- 1) It will track all ongoing and proposed NPS resources management activities that have been classified as either resources management, monitoring, or research and documented within area RMPs;

- 2) It will incorporate a process for putting in new and pertinent information at the regional level and at some park areas as the information becomes available; and

- 3) It will provide storage and instant retrieval of information about management, monitoring and research within each park unit and throughout the service. Key words will be utilized for information retrieval.

RITS will consist of three subsystems:

- 1) natural and cultural resources management data derived from the park's RMPs as described above;

- 2) abstracts of all reports derived from monitoring and research projects described in Project Statements, as well as from other closely related reports from a variety of sources; and

- 3) resource activities that are approved through special use permits issued by park personnel for studies and other resources management activities. These Resource Activity Permits include research and monitoring undertaken by non-NPS scientists or resource managers, and will replace the Superintendent's Annual Research Report. The Resource Activity Permit subsystem will provide the system with the most up-to-date information available from the parks.

The first step in the evolution of RITS software is underway. A functional requirements document is being written and will provide information about details of the system sufficient for actual design to begin by late summer or early fall.

Also underway is a complete review of area RMPs to determine compliance with the guidelines. Some clarification of the guidelines will be required to assure Plan consistency to the degree that they can be utilized as the basis for RITS.

It is anticipated that RITS will be a reality by 1984. It is expected to function on either IBM or HP hardware; that decision will be made by late summer, 1982. The Washington Office plans to develop and maintain the system; users at the parks and regions will be charged for system use on a time basis.

Taken together, records of the various activities will constitute a significant information base. RITS will:

- document the resources management, monitoring and research activities (as outlined in area RMPs) through all stages of conception, implementation and project reporting;

- provide reference on state-of-the-art methods and techniques for accomplishing (1) resources management tasks, (2) monitoring tasks, and (3) research tasks.

Because area RMPs will provide the basis for RITS development, it is especially important that the Plans, which are the responsibility of park superintendents, be as complete and concise as possible. Consistency is of greatest importance!

RITS will provide Service personnel instantaneously with up-to-date information and tie together the functions of resources management planning, management, monitoring, research, and reporting into a cohesive and integrated program. It will help to move the Service into a more modern mode to cope with the resource threats of our modern technological society.

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