

New Alaska Parks Present Challenge For Interpreters

"The Challenges for Interpretation in the New Alaskan Parks" was the title of a paper given Oct. 6, 1983, by R. Gerald Wright, associate professor of wildlife resources and project leader at the University of Idaho NPS/CPSU, before the Northwest Association of Interpretive Naturalists meeting in Moscow, Idaho.

National Park interpretive programs have evolved over the years in consort with park resource management policies, Wright told the naturalists. Today, programs on animal life are an important if not dominant theme in many parks. These programs have helped make the protection and the sanctity of all species two fundamental concepts most visitors associate with parks.

The policies which permit sport hunting in the Alaska preserves and subsistence hunting on all new Alaskan park lands, Wright said, may clash with such traditional expectations and feelings. Encounters with sport hunters, because they are more prevalent than subsistence users in NPS areas, may cause the greatest problems.

"Thus there is a need," Wright said, "to develop programs that will prepare the visitor for encounters with different user groups and help them to understand the present management policies. This means that naturalists will have to develop a clear understanding of the role that sport and subsistence hunters have played, historically, in the management of Alaskan resources."

Wright indicated that the existing studies of subsistence use in and around the new parks are a good starting point. Training programs that will aid park naturalists in understanding resource management policies are needed, and Wright suggested that these include providing the opportunity for naturalists to gain a familiarity with guiding subsistence personalities and techniques — even to the extent of accompanying guided trophy hunts and observing subsistence harvests.

The final section of Wright's paper discussed the difficulties in initiating a viable interpretive program in the new areas because of the lack of facilities. He pointed out that while the new areas were planned as parks of the *future*, the growth in current visitation has been dramatic — bringing the problems of serving the visitor with adequate interpretation sharply into *present* focus.