

RMPs Identify Baseline Data for Midwest NPs

By Gary D. Willson and Judy A. Skipski

The basic concept of National Park Service resource management centers on approved resource management plans (RMPs) that are based upon park management objectives. Since the mid-1960s, the Service has required RMPs to be completed by parks prior to initiating research or management actions. Compliance, however, has been sporadic. By early 1980, deficiencies in the resource management planning process were creating adverse impacts on the resources the Service was charged with protecting. New RMP guidelines therefore were released in December 1980, prompting a major move by the Service to: 1) better quantify the current status of each park's natural resources and resource management problems; 2) identify the research, monitoring and or management actions needed to resolve these problems; and 3) rank individual research, monitoring, and management-action projects for funding consideration. As a result, each park in the Midwest Region (MWR) completed an RMP according to these new guidelines by Dec. 1, 1981.

With the RMPs complete, we had, for the first time, a basis on which to determine baseline information needs for parks in the MWR. As a test, we conducted a review of the RMPs in early 1982 to assess the status of contemporary vegetation information for 22 parks with significant natural resources. We also reviewed Regional contract research reports for addi-

tional baseline information documentation which either added to or confirmed that found in the RMPs. We recorded several subcategories of vegetation information as complete or nearly complete (yes), incomplete (inc.) or lacking (-) for each park. In addition, we also counted the number of vegetation research contracts let between 1973 and 1982 for the 22 parks.

Sound management of a park ecosystem must be based on adequate baseline information. Except for Isle Royale National Park (NP), we found a pervasive lack of vegetation data for parks in the MWR (Table 1). This was especially pronounced in the small parks (those with less than 2,000 gross acres). We believed Isle Royale's unique situation was due, in part, to its wilderness national park status and the heightened scientific interest shown in such areas. Specific subcategories where information gaps were pronounced included nonvascular plant collections and permanent vegetation plot monitoring. In the others data were incomplete.

In response to this need, the Regional Science Office initiated the following comprehensive studies directed toward filling information gaps:

1. **Vascular plant collections** at Agate Fossil Beds National Monument (NM), Scotts Bluff NM, Homestead NM, Effigy Mounds NM, Fort Larned National Historic Site, George Washington Carver NM, Grand Portage NM, Pipestone NM, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and Voyageurs NP. New or updated collections, vegetation maps and exotic and endangered plant identifications will result from these studies. Also, long-term monitoring programs will be established as a part of these studies to provide an early warning system for impacts by visitors, exotic animals and plants, pollutants and other threats.

2. **A Regionwide endangered plant survey** by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A literature search is underway and fieldwork will commence in 1984 for 19 parks in the Region. The ultimate goal is identification and protection of all rare plants and their habitats within the Region's parks.

Our initial review of the RMPs showed much more was known about vegetation in larger parks than smaller parks. Subsequently, an accounting of the number of vegetation studies contracted between 1973 and 1982 in the 11 small parks versus the 11 large parks showed large parks being favored by a 7:1 margin (28 to 4 in number). Beginning in 1982, special funding categories were established by the Regional Science Office to ensure a more equitable distribution of research funds. Using this system, small parks received increased funding emphasis, primarily for vegetation baseline inventories. This was accomplished without a significant decrease in research funding commitments to large parks.

In summary, Resource Management Plans were written to document the extent and condition of park resources and provide overall management direction. We have used the RMPs in the Midwest Region to point out vegetation baseline information gaps. We also have shown, through RMPs, the contrast between large and small parks in terms of what is known about park resources. This has led to an increased emphasis by the Region to acquire adequate baseline information for all parks with significant natural resources. This information was needed to ensure a sound basis for management planning and resource protection in the parks.

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stand how the classical North American wildlife management objectives can be appropriately applied in Africa. This monograph clearly points out that that cannot necessarily be done. The book also has a clear message regarding the importance for resource managers and development experts to begin development assistance plans that incorporate natural resource conservation at a local level, and not in their bureaucratic institutions.

While Marks makes these points quite clearly (and frequently), and while he strongly argues for the consideration of local-level, social, cultural, and economic concerns (especially as to who really benefits from wildlife management) in any effective conservation approach, his points are often left after defining the problems without offering solutions.

There may not be any easy answers or simple solutions to effective wildlife management in Africa. It is clear though that unless development assistance efforts take local concerns and uses of wildlife into account, the socioeconomic factors unique to individual rural communities will be overlooked in favor of "mining" the wildlife for the few and not "harvesting" it for the commons. Further, it is becoming increasingly obvious that this "mining" of wildlife resources is, overall, detrimental to the resource itself.

Within the context of biological diversity conservation we now hear discussions concerning the need to examine the possibilities of transferring traditional (i.e., effective) agricultural technology. Perhaps it is time to reexamine the "accepted" wildlife management approaches and take a good look at traditional use of wildlife by integrating socioeconomic as well as ecological perspectives.