

Scientists 'Translate' Research

By Keith Yarborough

For six years now the National Park Service has been developing its air quality program — gathering data on the degradation of visibility, on how people perceive this degradation when viewing important vistas in National Parks, and on effects that air pollutants are having on sensitive park resources such as certain lichens and plants.

Two years ago, staff people in the Southwest Region saw the need to make a "translation" of these important findings for park managers, for rank and file park personnel, especially seasonals, and for the visiting public.

Starting in September 1982, planning was developed for an interpretive workshop that would begin to provide park interpreters in the Southwest, Western, and Rocky Mountain Regions with the facts they would need in order to shape air quality programs tailored to their own parks. Assistance was provided by the WASO Air Quality Division, particularly those technical experts on the Denver team.

The workshop was held in Santa Fe in late April 1983 and attended by line interpreters from Chaco Canyon, Bandelier, Capulin Mountains, Guadalupe Mountains, Big Bend, Arches Canyonlands, Bryce Canyon, Mesa Verde, and Grand Canyon. In the course of three workshop days, the interpreters were exposed to topnotch presentations by Phil Wondra, chief of the Air and Water Quality Division's research branch, from Bill Malm, senior research scientist on Wondra's staff, and from Darwin Morse, environmental protection specialist with the Division's policy, planning and implementation branch. Morse's presentation was built around a set of 84 "core" slides, which then were used by the workshop participants as the basis for developing their own park-specific interpretive programs.

Following the workshop, interpreters went back to their parks and polished and refined their presentations. The fine programs that have resulted are being presented in parks within the three Regions and have elicited uniformly excellent response from visitors. Even representatives of some of the identified pollution sources have reacted positively and without rancor to the even-handed, factual presentations being made by park interpreters.

In collaboration with editor/writer interpreter Dan Murphy of the Southwest Region, I put together a slide/tape show that has been presented at several scientific meetings, notably the Southwest and Rocky Mountain section of the AAAS in Lubbock, Texas in March 1984, the May 1984 National Air Quality conference hosted by Mesa Verde NP and focused on the Four Corners (Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, and Utah) area, and the Oct. 29-Nov. 2, 1984 meeting of the National Atmospheric Deposition Program Technical Committee held in Asheville, NC. As the author of this article, I regret being unable to supply illustrative photos, but as I tell my audiences, "We have nothing to show you but filthy pictures."

In all cases, the reaction has been commendation for the quality of the research and for the willingness of the National Park Service to speak out on an issue of such importance to the protection of air resources in key national parks.

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