

Systemwide Surveys Take Measure of Interpretive Programs

By Richard L. Cunningham

From December 1982 through January 1983, a survey of how natural resource management, cultural resource management, and visitor safety were being interpreted to park visitors was conducted throughout the National Park System.

The three surveys were intended to depict how park interpretation was being used to address specific resource management and visitor safety concerns. Publication of the survey results would provide a means for sharing this information to parks with similar concerns.

Two simple survey forms were developed; one for natural or cultural resource management and one for visitor safety.

The Regional Chief of Interpretation, Western Region, was responsible for conducting the survey, analyzing the survey returns and developing a final publication for servicewide distribution. The final publication, "Interpretation of Natural Resources Management, Cultural Resources Management, and Visitor Safety in the National Park System" was published by the Branch of Interpretation, Washington Office. This publication includes data on natural resource management and visitor safety; the cultural resource management survey will be published at a later date.

A total of 1,400 survey forms for all three subject matter surveys were received from 221 National Park areas. Survey forms returned included: Natural Resources Management - 590; Cultural Resources Management - 332; and Visitor Safety - 478.

The 590 Natural Resources Management survey forms were submitted from 145 different National Park Service areas. These survey forms were divided into 18 topics based upon related types of responses. The topics are General and Miscellaneous; NPS Policies, Ecosystems Management; Backcountry Management; Minimum Impacts; Fire Management; Erosion/Off-Trail Use; Impacts on Sand Dunes; Cave Management; Exotic Animals; Exotic Plants; Bear Management; Wildlife Management; Feeding Wildlife; Collecting Plants/Picking Wildflowers; Collecting Animals/Poaching; Collecting Fossils, Rocks, Petrified Wood; Littering; Vandalism.

Death Valley developed an excellent four-method

approach for communicating its burro management program: an evening slide program, an on-site guided walk to an area of heavy burro impact, a series of public discussions with the Superintendent, and throughout, an opportunity for the public to sign-up to receive management plan summaries. Hawaii Volcanoes developed a special exhibit on feral pigs. Everglades and Coulee Dam developed interpreter role-playing programs on exotic plant control.

Twenty-six parks returned 49 survey forms on fire management interpretive activities. Yosemite uses "fire roving" interpreters at sites of management fires. Big Thicket features half-day guide walks that demonstrate prescribed burning techniques. Olympic has developed a professionally produced slide/sound program for local off-site educational use. Grand Canyon has several articles in its park "newspaper" on fire management. Interpretive activities on air quality have been given at Capulin Mountain, Grand Canyon, and Chiricahua. Redwood offers a conducted trip to understand the watershed rehabilitation project.

One of the most innovative programs was at Everglades featuring "Developer Dan", a role-playing interpreter who wants to buy the land and develop it. Some wildlife management programs included Cape Cod's conducted hikes to observe tern colonies; banding Cave Swallows at Carlsbad Caverns; a mail-away slide program on Bald Eagles at Glacier; on-site guided walk at Padre Island when the endangered Ridley Turtles are released; and several parks with live snake demonstrations.

Of the 590 Natural Resources Management survey forms submitted, 400 were selected as best representative of a wide range of interpretive methods. Each park in the system has received a copy of the summary publication. Each regional office has received two sets of the actual survey forms and has the responsibility of distributing the forms to the parks upon their request.

Further information can be provided by the Regional Chief of Interpretation, Western Region (415) 556-3184.

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