

Some Reflections on a Career

By Neil "Jim" Reid

I know it may appear incredible to some of you, but truly my whole career has not been as the Regional Chief Scientist for the Rocky Mountain Region. No. I started out as a park warden (\$2,974 annum) monitoring trespass cattle at Theodore Roosevelt. There has been a myriad of changes both in the Service and myself since those carefree days in western North Dakota. My personal attitude gradually shifted from one of pure idealism to one of optimistic realism. Oh, yes, there have been periods when cynicism bubbled to the surface. All-in-all though, the Service has been good to me, and all of my assignments have been exciting, rewarding, and thoroughly enjoyable.

The National Parks are known worldwide as the crown jewels of the nation's cultural and natural heritage. It is the dedicated people, however, that make the Service great – the elite among Federal bureaus. I was fortunate indeed, early in my career to be tutored in the meaning and philosophy of the National Park Service by such outstanding Park people as Allyn Hanks, Harvey Reynolds, and Charlie Humberger.

The NPS has undergone a number of changes during the past three and a half decades. By change, I do not mean the periodic reorganizations, which are as predictable as the tides. Rather, it is the vast increase in the number of units within the National Park System; the increase in the number and complexity of issues facing today's park manager; the increase in the workforce; and the new methods we use in carrying out our tasks – including an acknowledgement that scientific research, or the knowledge derived from such research, is useful in the decision-making process.

At the close of the Wright-Dixon-Thompson era in the mid-1940s the Service lapsed into a period of relative scientific quiescence. Not everyone, of course – there were still Walt Kitams at Yellowstone, Bill Robertson at Everglades, and Ade Murie at Grant Teton and Mount McKinley. And the Service did have a fine complement of Archeologists and Research Historians. But natural science was left almost entirely to the park naturalists as a collateral duty – "if they were so inclined." A good deal of good work was done; for instance Jim Larson's work on the dark-rumped petrel in Hailakala NP, and there were many, many other examples.

The significant thing is that the majority of these projects were tolerated, but they did not have the financial support of the Service. Indeed, at that time there was a serious question posed by Congress and throughout the Service as to whether or not the NPS had a mandate, or any other reason, to engage in research activities. The general consensus was that the Service was not a "research agency," and any knowledge required could be readily obtained from the Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, and Geological Survey. Even some of the field managers were skeptical that research could provide information useful to park management. Common sense was all one needed to run a park.

Times have changed. The Robbins Report

and the Leopold Committee Report of the 1960s have made it clear that we do not always have adequate knowledge of park resources and ecological processes to intelligently maintain the integrity of park environments. As 20th Century civilization has steadily encroached on park boundaries, what at one time were protective buffers of undeveloped land, have been transformed into productive oil and gas fields, mining operations, ski and other recreation areas, urban development, and access roads. All of these developments have had a profound effect on wildlife movements, air and water quality, noise and light pollution, distribution of exotics, and the patterns of public park use. We no longer have the luxury of depending primarily on Nature to overcome the impacts of modern man on park resources. The perturbations are too great to ignore, and they require ecologically sound mitigation. The latter, of course, requires considerable research, and the application of the research findings to management actions requires considerable wisdom and sensitivity. Therefore, a thorough testing and evaluation of management methods should be mandatory.

Congress, through passage of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, the Endangered Species Act, and other conservation legislation, has confirmed that, indeed, the Service has responsibilities in the protection of natural resources on park lands. Most responsible Service officials agree that a research effort is essential in carrying out our mission. But questions still need to be resolved. First and foremost, what is the role of natural science research, and where does it fit, in the National Park Service? Current Service policy requires that any research to be undertaken must be proposed in an approved natural resource management plan.

In my view, this is a myopic policy which unnecessarily limits the scope and role of natural science in the Service. True, there is a close relationship between natural resource management and natural science. Planners, however, are not all resource management specialists, and they need the research information up front, before a plan has been formalized and "approved." GMPs, DCPs, interpretive plans, and other planning documents need to be based on research before the decisions are made, not afterwards. A common sense approach to the need for and role of research should be in the Service but it has not happened in over 30 years, and I don't expect that such a phenomenon will occur soon. Not, at least, until there is agreement that we have but one Service and one purpose.

There have been many solutions as to where research should be placed in the organization – ranging from maintaining a one-man branch (sans secretary) under the Ranger Activities Division in the Rocky Mountain Region to elevating science temporarily to the Associate Regional Director level in the Pacific Northwest Region. Then again, there are the WASO divisions of Air and Water Quality and Energy, Mining and Minerals under the Associate Director for Natural Resources. While my preference is that research

be closely aligned with planning, the exact organizational structure is not important, provided science responds to the users' (planners') need. I am not convinced this proviso is universally respected and suspect that many research projects are undertaken based on the researcher's interest, rather than management's needs.

Another area of special concern is the need to strengthen park funding bases for both research and resources management. A number of parks are faced with the problem of carrying out long-term research, management, and monitoring programs on "soft funds" provided through regionwide natural science programs or one of the several servicewide science bases. Some of these funding sources, such as the \$7+ million Natural Resources Preservation Program (NRPP), have administratively imposed time limits on the length of projects. The uncertainty of funding makes it impossible to respond to significant and critical resource problems such as grizzly bear management and endangered species restoration, which require time in excess of 3 years. Some way, funds must be allocated to the field areas where the work is to be accomplished. It does relatively little good for parks to submit 10-237s if those submissions are merely used to justify base increases in the Washington Office. The funds may be used for legitimate and worthy causes, but the initial problem will remain.

Lawrence Slobodkin, in his book *Growth and Regulation of Animal Populations* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1962), remarked: "If, as is quite likely, vital aspects of man's ecology are dependent on undomesticated species, nature sanctuaries not only are of esthetic, sentimental and recreational value but are indispensable reserves of biological raw material to be used for retracing of our ecological steps." Man, indeed, has changed the land upon which we live, and continues to do so at an ever increasing rate. National parks will be much more than "pleasuring grounds" as we move toward the 21st century. Labels such as wilderness area and international Biosphere Reserves will assist in focusing public attention on the National Parks. But labels in themselves will not protect the resources or the ecological process upon which they depend. Knowledge, expertise, and wisdom are needed. The years ahead will be an exciting challenge for the National Park Service. There will be no easy solutions and no miracles – just hard, dedicated work.

It appears Director Mott will make every effort to breathe new fire into the organization – or perhaps, more correctly, rekindle the old dedication to the principles and ideals of the Service in each of its employees. No matter how nostalgic the remembrance of those carefree days of 30 years ago, there is no room today for nostalgia or complacency. The challenges, some of which have not yet been identified even as problems, are staggering. I no longer will be directly involved, but I have every confidence in each of you that the challenges will be squarely met, and the purpose of the National Park Service will be faithfully and surely carried out.

Good luck and farewell.