

Wilderness Task Force Seeks Uniform Policies

By Karen Simpson

NPS Director William Penn Mott, Jr. recently appointed a Wilderness Task Force to review wilderness management policy and develop a wilderness program. At the Tucson Regional Directors' meeting in November, 1985 it was proposed that the NPS develop a wilderness action program in support of the Director's 12-Point Plan.

The Task Force met on January 14-16, 1986. At the Director's suggestion, the Task Force used the Five-Year Management Action Program developed by the Steering Committee of the First National Wilderness Management Workshop convened by the University of Idaho as a basis from which to develop its report.

The Task Force recommended that the policies contained in the 1978 *Management Policies* manual concerning wilderness management should not be changed substantively. The group found them consistent with the intent of the Wilderness Act of 1964 and adequate as general policies.

However, the members of the Task Force noted that wilderness areas are not managed consistently Servicewide. Reasons for this include (1) superintendents interpret wilderness policy differently, (2) the NPS does not coordinate wilderness policy centrally, (3) the NPS has not published guidelines on issues such as the use of aircraft in wilderness areas, and (4) the NPS does not have an efficient way to collect

and disseminate information to the parks about wilderness management techniques.

The Task Force discussed the elements of an action plan that would deal with these issues and improve NPS wilderness management generally. Participants considered the recommendations of the Steering Committee of the Wilderness Management Workshop for inclusion in the action plan, and agreed that most of the Steering Committee's recommendations should be included. The Task Force suggested other items to be included in the plan, for example, that the Director designate a wilderness coordinator in WASO and establish an NPS Wilderness Coordinating Group. The coordinator could collect and disseminate to park managers information on wilderness management techniques, analyze the uses that visitors and others make of wilderness areas to ensure that they are appropriate, inventory wilderness training needs, and use consumer advertising to educate the public on wilderness management issues. The Coordinating Group would work with other Federal land managing agencies on wilderness management planning, training and research activities.

The participants also suggested ways in which park managers could improve wilderness management. For example, they could prepare wilderness management plans, as part of their RMPs or separately, identify threats to wilderness, set limits of acceptable change for wilderness resources, and determine the minimum requirements their parks have for mechanized and motorized equipment in wilderness areas. Park managers also could conduct workshops and other programs relating to wilderness management, provide the public with more information on wilderness management and expand interpretive activities relating to wilderness.

The Task Force is currently preparing its recommendations on wilderness management policy and the five-year wilderness action plan and will distribute these recommendations to the Regional offices for review and comment shortly.

Simpson is a program analyst in the WASO air quality division.