

Natural Resource Specialist Candidates Wind Up 22-Month Training Period

By Sue Consolo and Cat Hawkins

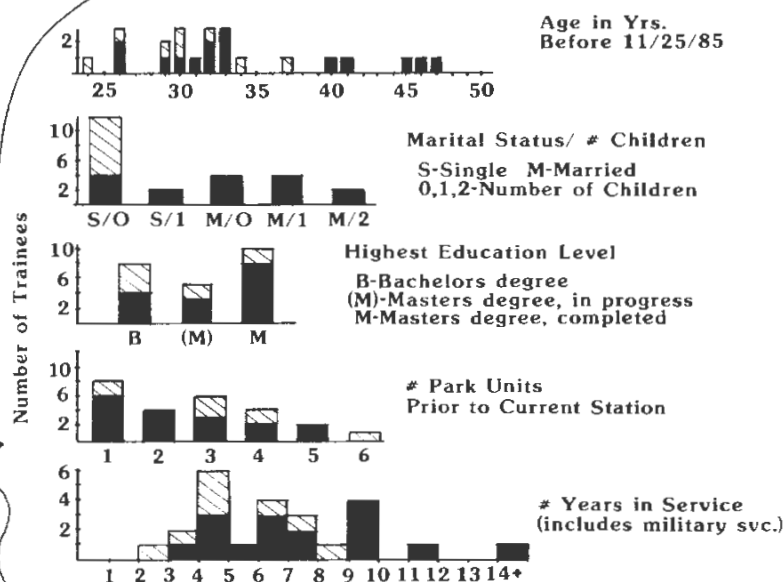
Members of the second class of Natural Resource Specialist trainees are well into the latter half of their 22-month program, having completed an intense first year of training. Since the training program began late in 1984, the 23 participants have spent 31 weeks in academic settings and the remainder of their time "home" at a training park or Regional Office assignment. All but four of the trainees relocated to new park areas early in 1985, and at the end of the program this October all will assume Resource Management positions in destination parks or Regional Offices. Training and destination parks were chosen by each Region.

The rationale for sending trainees to a training park prior to their destination assignment evolved from evaluation of the first Resource Specialist training program, which ran from 1982-84. Most participants in the first class remained in parks from which they were selected, both during and after the training period. This arrangement created conflicts between job responsibilities already assumed at their original duty stations and trainees' travel and training schedules. Coordinators of the second program reasoned that if trainees moved straight to their destination locales, new job responsibilities would conflict with the academic schedule. Thus, the concept of a training locale was developed for the 1984-86 class. Training parks were selected on 1) the presence of a natural resource program which would present a variety of issues and skills, and 2) willingness of staff to act as trainers and share their expertise. The first year was designed to present the participants with a broad range of academic studies. The second year, the trainees were to gain from practical experience and individual guidance on assignments in their regions or parks. When graduates of the current program move to their destinations, they will be well-trained and free to devote work time to their new duties.

Academic courses were selected to give all trainees a wide range of knowledge in the types of resource problems encountered servicewide. Courses were held nationwide at Cooperative Park Study Units and NPS areas, to make use of the best academic talent available and acquaint the students firsthand with a variety of resource issues. In nearly all courses, trainees were required to pass an exam or complete another graded project.

Training completed to date includes: Air Quality and Integrated Pest Management, held at the Denver Service Center; Water Resources at Colorado State University; Vegetation Management at UC Davis; Fisheries & Aquatic Systems at Oregon State University; Wildlife I & II at Texas A&M and UC Davis; Coastal Processes at Rutgers University; Mining & Minerals at the Colorado School of Mines; Geographic Information Systems at the EROS Data Center; Budget & Administration and Cave Management at Carlsbad Caverns; a series of week-long courses at Clemson University, including Microcomputer Skills, Cultural Resource Management, and Natural Resources Law; and Fire Ecology and Management, held at Boise Interagency Fire Center and Yosemite NP.

The majority of the courses were completed in 1985. This year, however, the emphasis shifted to the



PROFILE OF THE TRAINEES

Women Men

The group, composed of 8 women and 15 men, ranges in age from 24 - 47, with almost half the group being 30 - 35 years of age. Approximately half the group is single (8 women, 4 men), and half is married (11 men). All trainees have completed bachelors degrees, five (2 women, 3 men) are currently working on masters degrees, and ten (2 women, 8 men) have completed masters degrees. Disciplines in which degrees were earned cover the natural sciences (zoology, wildlife management, forestry, botany, biology, microbiology), the physical sciences (geography), the liberal arts (education, history, journalism), recreation, conservation, and land use planning. Some jobs held prior to working for the National Park Service include social worker, realty specialist, banker, teacher, forester, military intelligence officer, and wildlife biologist. The average number of park units in which trainees worked prior to their current training assignments is 2.6. Including seasonal and all other federal agency work, the number of years in service (to 12/85) for the group ranges from 2.8 to 14.5 years; the average is 6.7 years. Trainee Rich Harris (Anchorage, AK) took the picture.

in-park experience. Each trainee is required to complete a significant project to benefit his or her training park or region. Projects were chosen by each trainee and a counselor who acts as the supervisor at the training location. The trainee coordinator from WASO, Dr. William Walker, and several program consultants also reviewed the project proposals.

Training projects vary from resource monitoring, studies, and habitat evaluations to production of resource maps and planning documents. Inventories are underway of vertebrate fauna at Saint Gaudens NHS, endangered species at Indiana Dunes, the extent of oil and gas development at Big Cypress, and the ecology of the William Floyd Estate at Fire Island NS. Trainees are studying exotic plants at Rock Creek Park, collecting native seeds for planting

at Gettysburg NMP and San Juan Islands NHS, and compiling baseline data on a native spruce beetle outbreak at Katmai NP. Mount Rainier will gain an evaluation of spotted owl habitat, and Dinosaur an assessment of the historic effects of fire on plant and animal communities. Water quality monitoring programs are being developed for Isle Royale and Mount Rainier, and a river recreation study is in preparation for Ozark NSR. Trainees are producing vegetation maps for Chickasaw NRA and Carlsbad Caverns-Guadalupe Mountains NP, and an air quality monitoring program for the Northwest Alaska areas. At Hawaii Volcanoes NP, the trainee is assisting in on-going efforts to remove feral pigs. Plans are in the works for landscape management at Delaware Water Gap, and vegetation management for restoration of

vistas at Fort Foote in National Capital Parks-East. Elsewhere, trainees are writing plans to reintroduce bighorn sheep into Sequoia-Kings Canyon, and to manage exotic vegetation in Yellowstone, white-tailed deer in Shenandoah, and raccoons in the Everglades.

The natural resource training programs were initiated in response to the **State of the Parks Report**, which identified a need for better information about critical resource problems. Director Mott's 12-point plan calls for continued emphasis on strengthening resource management expertise, and the training programs have received high praise. In response to current budgetary restraints and assessment of a new approach to the program, NPS will initiate a one year class beginning in FY 1987.

As for the present class, while training and travel have sometimes been hard on families and trainees' lives at home, all the participants have enjoyed and learned much from the training experiences across the country. Beyond learning in the classroom, the trainees have built a network of friends and professionals to call upon throughout their careers.

Some of the graduates will move on to Natural Resource Specialist positions at their destination parks. Others will be classified in Ranger positions. One trainee has suggested that the class might better be called "natural resource generalists," since the thrust of the training has been to provide familiarity with an array of problems, sources of assistance, and possible solutions, rather than to create a cadre of highly specialized scientists.

More important than job titles is the graduates' willingness to join existing resource management personnel in devoting time and energy to protecting vital park resources threatened by internal and external pressures. A class member summarized the training program by saying, "I feel my perspective on management of natural resources has expanded the equivalent of several years' experience. However, more than half of learning is *doing*. I now look

forward to the challenge of applying what I've learned to problems in my destination park and future assignments."

Hawkins is a Natural Resource Specialist trainee at Mount Rainier, bound for Olympic NP. Consolo has been training at Yellowstone, and is destined for Badlands NP.



The Oregon coast is the setting for this exercise in electroshocking fish. The Natural Resource Specialist trainees so engaged are (from left) Victoria Mendiola (Ozark National Scenic River), Jim Milestone (Pacific Northwest Regional Office) and Jenny Bjork (Southwest Regional Office).