

Strategic Management Needed To Maximize Park Resources

Editor's Note: Following is part of the presentation made by Asst. Supt. Robert L. Arnberger of Everglades NP to the June 3, 1987 superintendency course at Delaware Water Gap. The full paper, which discusses the need for NPS superintendents to abandon the old "custodial" approach and to embrace "strategic management" will appear in a forthcoming issue of the George Wright Society's FORUM (Vol. V No. 4 1988). In the full article, Arnberger examines the societal and environmental pressures that have led to the need for a new strategic approach to park management and he details the legislated imperatives that demand this new kind of superintendency. Presented here are Arnberger's suggestions for how NPS superintendents can adapt to the changing needs of the National Park System and maximize the usefulness of park resources and the knowledge they engender.

When the park manager enters the decision role, success will largely depend on the manager's ability to: (1) establish clear objectives; (2) anticipate potential impacts; (3) find help to support park interests; (4) understand the planning and regulatory process; (5) make some compromises consistent with park purposes; (6) follow through on promises.

The mechanics of problem identification, solution, and community involvement are as varied as the number of parks, managers, and situations. Realizing this, I hope to weave for you a fabric of insights I have gleaned from the following sources:

1. Essay by Roland Wauer on "The Role of the National Park Service Natural Resource Manager," February 1980;
2. Essay and presentation by Rick Smith on "Some Non-Ecological Principles," December 1981, later printed in *Park Science*, Winter 1984;
3. Draft Report on "Park Protection" by WASO based upon interviews with superintendents and members of their staff in 15 parks heavily affected by development pressures on adjacent lands, March 1987;
4. Essays and presentations on "The Politics of Resource Management at Saguaro National Monument," by Robert Arnberger, April 1986.

This fabric is heavily textured by my own feelings and experiences. It does not reflect the only way to do something. You may take issue with my perceptions. Your reactions are every bit as valid as mine and these other authors.

Proposition I

Have a clear understanding of what the *real* issue is and what the NPS position is. A superficial understanding of the issue is quickly perceived and the credibility of data or founding philosophy can be irretrievably impaired.

Corollaries to consider:

1. Recognize that a legislative and administrative history of a park is based upon a series of promises, deals, trade-offs, and compromises required to garner support for the project. Don't make a fatal mistake of ignoring them, but examine them in a *positive* light relative to the *opportunities* they offer.
2. The NPS should present its own interests and desires independently and avoid joining "coalitions." It seems to me too easy to have a coalition, rather than the superintendent, dictating what is best for the park unit. As well, a coalition can mix the primary issue with secondary special interest issues that end up confusing and confounding those that must resolve the issue. By not "joining the party," you may be tagged as a "fence sitter." Combat this perception aggressively by repeatedly speaking to NPS interests and stressing the need for the independence of your action. Alliances differ from coalitions and are a neces-

sary fact of life. Realize that the ally you have today may be your adversary tomorrow. Seek strong alliances based upon philosophical and practical similarities. The weakest alliances are exclusively issue specific and any similarity of philosophy or mission is coincidental. Beware of the "wolf in lamb's clothing" who wishes to seek an alliance for other purposes.

3. Avoid confusing friends and foe. Exercise well-thought-out "battlefield tactics" but don't let such maneuvers confuse those who hold the key to solution. When the question is asked, "I wonder what side he is on now?", answer it aggressively and consistently with, "the resource's side." Frequently, issues get clouded by the variety and number of community groups involved. Separate out the NPS issue and deal in a clear-cut manner with those issues that impact the resource *you* manage. Dealing with other issues can weaken your position.

Proposition II

A community must possess a sense of investment in the positive solution of problems. Park problems are community problems and solutions must be perceived as having their origins in the community rather than within the park.

Corollaries to consider:

1. The "people" process differs from the "political" process. Developing a sense of investment in these two groups may bring you to the same final product but is usually a result of different processes. A politician's sense of "investment" may be edged with hard realities and compromises. The "people's" sense of investment may be one of emotion and philosophy lacking a great deal of practicality.
2. Special interest groups will assent to investment or agreement *only* when they are convinced that their *own* interests are being served. Philosophical arguments generally will be futile. Concentrate on determining that *they* will gain rather than what the park will gain.
3. Market your park as an integral and vital member of the community. Know the demographics of your visitation and the economics that your presence in the community represents. Speak to how the park contributes to local employment, citizen enjoyment, emergency services, visitor dollars, and "national image" for the community. Build a constituency actively and purposefully.

Proposition III

Know the game players and be well versed in the rules by which *they* must play, for those are the rules you must play by also. Get involved early and watch and listen carefully as the issue begins to develop. Chart not only your own progress in the issue, but that of others as well. Knowing what was said in preliminary meetings and knowing the dynamics of the participants may directly influence the outcome.

Corollaries to consider:

1. The administrative and legal process by which a community plans and leads itself will be even more important for you to learn than the similar process in your own agency. Read the comprehensive plans, the zoning ordinances, transportation plans, and neighborhood plans. Know what the planner's positions are, know what the politicians feel, and know what the special interest groups want. Knowledge of the process and personalities is the best tool for predicting behavior.

2. Don't be accused of "not coordinating" and don't be a stranger to the key agency orchestrating the process. Pursue "official coordination" responsibilities but don't forget the regular informal visit to discuss a mutual issue or find out more about an issue. Remember the reality of coordination – once you start, be sure you *fairly* involve yourself in the full spectrum of the issue – with both friend and foe.

3. Recognize that other points of view may be valid and try to understand the interests of other participants. While being concerned about impacts on parks, don't fail to recognize that the park sometimes produces negative impacts on adjacent landowners. Respect other's interests – even if we may not agree with them. Be "up front" in your disagreement and realize that "too much bobbing and weaving can lose you the prize fight."

Proposition IV

It is possible to make decisions based upon philosophical considerations and they will be accepted if you are honest about it. However, there is no substitute for accurate science data to combine with the philosophical consideration. Decisions are based on a variety of facts and information and should not be subject to exclusive subservience to scientific data or required research. You won't often get away with a philosophical or emotional decision, so be sure you take your best shot. Ultimately the data will be asked for or required anyway.

Corollaries to consider:

1. "Crying wolf" will work twice – not three times. Even your friends will desert you when you present arguments that have little substance. Substance and strength lie in facts, data, more facts, and more data. If you are making a decision based upon few facts, then say so. Creation of data and presentation of irrelevant facts are quickly detected.
2. Prepare to be challenged with every decision. Before making the decision, institute a process of evaluating what the challenges may be and where they will come from.
3. Deal with specific impacts upon a specific resource: your arguments will be more persuasive than appeals to the general principles of conservation.
4. Expect to have the rug pulled out from under you. Develop fall-back positions and be prepared to negotiate. Distinguish between what is *essential* to protect the park and what is merely desirable. Know how to conduct an effective damage control mission and be able to distinguish when you have done enough. Too much damage control purveys a sense of weakness and lack of planning.

Proposition V

The solution to a problem is not necessarily dependent on NPS assuming the leadership role. Plan your strategy to determine levels of involvement and what opportunities exist to deliberately avoid or engage involvement.

Corollaries to consider:

1. Sometimes "your" statement can be more effectively said by someone else. Realize that others can be leaders too, and may carry the banner more ably than you. Don't avoid behind the scenes maneuvering and action in order to ensure that resource interests are protected. Realize that a variety of avenues can lead to a common goal.

2. The political and special interest friends of the park must be alerted and prepared to play a part in the solution of highly charged political issues. Park managers must be able to recognize the point after which they can do no more. Third party interests must be similarly astute in recognizing this impasse point and be prepared to exercise the opportunities available to them.

3. Beware of the "Joan of Arc" complex. She commanded an army, but she was burned at the stake. Our own egos sometimes lead us into roles we should not accept. Coalitions looking for either leaders or scapegoats constantly search for that "magnetic issue and personality." Remember that generals manage their battles from war rooms at the rear of the front. Victory usually is achieved by a variety of field commanders who follow a strategy developed by the general.

4. Be persistent and patient. Some of the success stories are the result of efforts by park managers who have pursued their objective against heavy odds. The time and energy invested in endless meetings may not produce immediate results, but they build credibility and may lead to a key decision that will protect the park. There are a lot of friends out there – your job is to make contact with them.

5. Remember, you aren't the only one planning involvement or action strategies. Just as you incorporate others into your agenda without their knowledge, they are doing the same with you. As you manipulate the process and the personalities within the process, realize you are probably being manipulated by others. Be prepared to react when someone else's agenda maneuvers you into a position where you don't wish to be. Similarly, be prepared to react and seize the opportunity when someone else's agenda has maneuvered you to "where you want to be."

Each park manager will find his or her own niche in the politics of community resource management program. Each manager will develop a personal style and form in dealing with the community. I simply contend that your entrance into the community must be a conscious decision. It begins with a personal philosophical orientation to *take* action rather than have it forced upon you. It recognizes that remedy is intimately linked to community politics. It requires a park manager to be more than a "Custodial Superintendent." It involves accepting a strategic management role that allows maneuvering in fluid and value laden political environments where the variety of legislative, administrative, and policy remedies can be used more decisively to protect the resource.

A new concept of conservation biology also must evolve, to better respond to the realities now being faced by our parks. This will allow a manager the flexibility of dealing with issues and making strategic decisions based on less than the ideal empirical evidence, concentrating on systems and entire biological communities. Ultimately philosophy, legislation, a new biology and strategic management is translated into mechanical field applications by the park superintendent.