

Ecosystem Management for Parks and Wilderness

Report of the Workshop

By James K. Agee

Park and wilderness managers face significant challenges and opportunities in the stewardship of park and wilderness resources for present and future generations. To develop an improved conceptual approach to managing change in parks and wilderness, a workshop involving 33 scientists, planners, and

managers was held in April, 1987, at the University of Washington's Pack Forest near Mount Rainier. Participants included ten people from NPS and six from the Forest Service, with the remainder representing various academic disciplines from across the country. The report of the workshop, summarized here, will be available in January, 1988.

The workshop focused on cooperative approaches to park and wilderness ecosystem management. Understanding change, and sometimes unpredictable change, is an essential part of understanding how these systems function. Because parks and wildernesses are non-equilibrium systems, management strategies must deal effectively with uncertainty.

Successful management of uncertainty involves: (1) defining goals and measurable targets for ecosystem condition; (2) defining boundaries for components of priority concern; (3) developing management strategies which recognize that issues will transcend political boundaries; and (4) establishing a program to monitor the strategies chosen. Nine principles of ecosystem management are discussed, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of structures (formal) and unstructured (informal) approaches to ecosystem management. Top priority issues are identified in four areas. Three common themes emerged from the prioritization process:

There is a need to define precisely the management objectives for park and wilderness lands and to integrate these with objectives for surrounding lands. National as well as specific local guidance is needed.

More information about physical, biological, and social components of park and wilderness ecosystems is needed on both sides of political boundaries.

Key indicators of ecosystem condition are needed, and methods for evaluating management effectiveness must be identified.

All of these common themes point to a need for more precise direction in management goal-setting and more accurate assessment of progress in the chosen direction. The report will be available without charge from either Jim Agee or Darryll Johnson at the NPS CPSU, College of Forest Resources (AR-10), University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195. A book containing the theme presentations from the workshop will be available for purchase from University of Washington Press in mid-1988.

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