

Improving the NPS Science Program: A Rejoinder

By R. Gerald Wright

CPSU University of Idaho Moscow, Idaho

Editor's Note: The editorial board of *Park Science* is grateful to Gerry Wright for sharing at this time the following information elicited by him from NPS scientists as part of his forthcoming book. The results of Wright's survey make interesting reading on the heels of the Jim Wood article that appeared on pages 22 and 23 of the Winter 1988 issue of *Park Science*.

In June 1987 I sent out an informal questionnaire to all NPS scientists involved in fish and wildlife research to solicit their views on certain aspects of NPS research. I am currently writing a book dealing with the history of wildlife management and research in NPS, and the concluding chapter attempts to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the NPS research program. I developed a questionnaire in order to gain input for this chapter. I recognize that the nature of the questionnaire required respondents to make generalizations on what are often subtle issues. Thus, even though there was considerable consensus on many issues, one needs to be cautious in interpreting these data.

Forty-four questionnaires were sent out; forty-one individuals returned them for a 93 percent response rate. All responses were anonymous. The responses to the first two questions are given below.

Question 1. How has the quality of the NPS natural science research program changed over the past 10-15 years?

	N	%
1) increased in quality	26	69
2) decreased in quality	1	2
3) remained about the same	11	29

Question 2. What importance do you place on publishing the results of research in recognized professional journals?

	N	%
1) very important	31	78
2) somewhat important	9	22
3) no opinion	0	0
4) minor importance	0	0
5) not important at all	0	0

The results indicate that NPS researchers place a great importance on publications. This was evident in the written comments attached to many questionnaires. Several individuals pointed to the need for an NPS technical report series as an outlet, particularly for management-oriented publications. The high interest in publications struck me as somewhat ironic because the reviews I have done of NPS scientific literature (for example Wright and Hayward 1985) have shown a low portion (< 20%) of NPS research winds up in professional journals.

The final question asked respondents to rank on a scale of one to five (from very important to not important), nine factors that were viewed as hindering research in National Parks. The replies (in percent) to this question, ranked in order of the number of responses in the first two categories, are shown in Table 1.

These responses seem to indicate that more than any other factor, the NPS natural science program could be greatly improved by better communication between scientists and managers. This is not a new problem. It was voiced time and again in interviews I have conducted with retired NPS biologists in the course of my research.

The feelings of scientists on the first three factors also match the perceptions independently derived by Jim Wood and discussed in the winter issue of *Park Science*. This publication, as well as the periodic science conferences, have attempted to bridge the communication gap and develop a dialog between managers and scientists. Clearly, additional efforts are needed if the problem is to be solved.

Citation:

Wright, R. G. and P. Hayward. 1985. National parks as research areas with a focus on Glacier N.P. *Bull. Ecol. Soc.* 66:354-357.

Table 1.

Factors that hinder research	most important least important				
	1	2	3	4	5
Managers do not understand role that research should play in NPS mission	50	45	3	2	—
Lack of an agency research mandate	63	16	11	5	5
Managers distrust scientists	21	47	24	8	—
Supervision of scientists by non-scientists	27	40	15	10	8
Managers do not feel scientific research is important to park management	16	47	21	13	3
Scientists don't produce a timely or relevant product	13	41	47	—	—
Managers fear research findings will alter the management of their park	11	43	39	5	2
Researchers lack an understanding of management needs	10	34	39	15	2
Decentralized administrative structure of NPS science program	26	13	23	15	23