

NPCA Unveils NP System Plan

"Seventy-one years after the founding of the National Park Service, the NPS research program is underfunded, understaffed, and struggling for an identity in the organization."

Thus opens the section on "Research in the Parks: an assessment of needs," in the executive summary of the National Parks and Conservation Association's National Park System Plan, unveiled at a well-publicized press conference on Feb. 18 in Washington, DC.

The nine-volume study (of which the science and research section is Volume No. 2) is the result of three years of work by a wide-ranging group of professionals from within and outside the National Park Service. The work was funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the American Conservation Association, the Beldon Fund, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

"The role of research in the NPS is ill-defined, primarily due to the lack of a specific legislative mandate directing the Service to engage in natural, cultural and social science as an essential element of its mission," the executive summary states.

"The organization of the research program historically has been unstable. NPCA found the research program to be fragmented and suffering from little policy guidance from the Washington Office (WASO). Regional research programs are structured inconsistently across regions and from park to park. Fragmentation and lack of consistency have created obstacles to inter-regional and interagency communication, and have resulted in duplication of effort," the summary continues.

Fourteen recommendations are summarized, beginning with the need for a specific legislative mandate from Congress for NPS research which "clearly defines the role of research in resource management and decision making and requires the completion of standardized Servicewide inventories of natural and cultural resources, and implementation of permanent monitoring programs."

Also recommended are a separate line item in the annual NPS budget for research equivalent to 10 percent of the total operating budget and establishment of a Science Advisory Board of "demonstrably qualified experts to provide independent, balanced and expert assessment of NPS natural, cultural, and social science research needs and programs."

On the back cover of the Executive Summary, William Penn Mott, Jr., NPS Director is quoted as saying: "I have been looking forward to the results of your work on this project and the beginning of a spirited debate on the future of the National Park System." Retired NPS Director Russell E. Dickenson also is quoted: "The insights and conclusions drawn are, for the most part, compatible with my own experience and thinking."

The Executive Summary is available immediately for \$11 including postage by writing National Park System Plan, care of the NPCA 1015 31st St., N.W., Washington, DC 20007. The nine-volume Report is still in press and no price has yet been determined.