

NPCA Focuses on Protecting, Planning for Parks of the Future

The National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA) used the occasion of its March 15-16 meeting in Washington, D.C. on Protecting and Planning for Parks of the Future to present its recently released National Park System Plan: A Blueprint for Tomorrow. The Plan, over 2,000 pages in length, recommends establishment of the NPS as an independent agency directly responsible to Congress and the President; enactment of specific legislative mandates and increased funding, for science, resources management and interpretation; establishment of an independent research arm within the Park

Service, and significant land acquisition and boundary adjustments ... recommendations sure to create considerable discussion and debate in coming months.

NPCA President Paul Pritchard announced appointment of an interdisciplinary commission to review the NPS science and resource management program. Under the leadership of John Gordon, dean of the Yale School of Forestry, the Commission on Science and Resource Management Policy will assess resource policy and implementation strategies. (See story p. 16 this issue.) They will work closely with NPS professionals and other informed parties to assess current policy and program status and offer philosophical and technical guidance for improving the effectiveness of the NPS science program.

Congressman Bruce Vento, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, challenged the meeting to better understand and protect park resources. He discussed his recently submitted legislation to establish the NPS as a separate agency with the Director appointed by and accountable to the President and the Senate. Vento expressed concern over what he sees as increased and inappropriate influence of political forces in the Interior Department on NPS matters. He also focused on the recent fee legislation, which was designed to supplement and enhance the Service efforts in science, resource management and interpretation, not, as is now being proposed, to supplant or replace base budget items. Other speakers in the introductory session included Deputy NPS Director Dennis Galvin and former Director George Hartzog.

Symposia and workshops included sessions on Providing Park Protection through Legal Measures, Innovative Financial Programs, Alternative Means of Providing Funding and Protection for Parks, Efforts to Protect Peripheries of Parks, Integrating Science and Resource Management (including Larry Bell and John Dennis of NPS-WASO), Concessions and Tourism (David Gackenbach, Chief of Concessions, WASO), Carrying Capacity: Current Applications (David Parsons, Sequoia and Kings Canyon), and Education and Interpretation (Rob Milne, International Affairs Office, WASO).

A closing session on Achieving Balance Between Preservation and Use made for lively discussion among George Fleharty (President of ARA Outdoor World, the concessioner at Denali) on the importance of concessioners working with the Park Service to assure long term resource preservation, writer Paul Schullery on his experiences in the Yellowstone ecosystem, and Alaska Regional Director Boyd Evison on a manager's view of the difficulties in balancing preservation and use.

The meeting, which also included presentations by Sen. John Chafee and Cong. Wayne Owens, was well attended by park professionals, including a smattering of NPS managers and resource professionals. Next year's NPCA meeting will focus on presenting the recommendations of the Gordon Blue Ribbon Commission on Science and Resource Management Policy, in effect updating the 1963 Leopold Report.

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