

# letters

## Expansion of NPS Science?

Should the NPS science program seek broader (outside NPS) fields? Is this an idea whose time has come? I believe it at least needs exploration and thought, for if NPS science is ever to seek to expand outside the parks, now may be a good time. The National Parks and Conservation Association blue ribbon committee is contemplating, inventory and monitoring guidelines and natural resource management guidelines are in preparation, the Hill-Soukup Report recommends internal changes, a "white paper" on cooperative park studies units is in draft, and biological diversity and global climate change are buzz considerations heard almost daily.

Why should NPS science expand outside the parks? I believe only one basic reason is valid – service to the nation. What does NPS science have to offer the nation? Arguably, leadership in inventory and monitoring, wildlands research, natural fire research, and research in park management and preservation such as "landscape ecology" ala Noe and Hammitt's Scientific Monograph No. 18 and restoration of cultural landscapes to those of historic eras, perhaps several more; I don't have a good grasp of this from my big, but isolated, corner of the world.

What are some expected benefits of expansion to NPS science? Hopefully, added personnel, funding, prestige and, most of all and related to all, increased capability. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) does wildlife research nationwide, not just in National Wildlife Refuges; the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) researches forestry nationwide, not just in National Forests, and both science programs are stronger because of those added responsibilities. We are now contemplating establishing research centers but USFWS, a smaller agency, already has nearly a dozen ranging from the Patuxent Center to the Northern Prairie Center to the National Fisheries Center. The size and importance of USFS research needs no elaboration.

What are possible drawbacks? One is dispersion of effort. NPS Science does not have the means now to do the job that has to be done just in the National Parks. Another is possible isolation of science from parks and their managers. I said expansion is an idea, I *didn't* say it's necessarily a *good* idea, only that we should consider it; whether it would turn out to be good or bad would depend on many factors and decisions.

For added perspective, consider NPS archeology: Our cultural colleagues, by law and executive order, have a national role. According to their brochure "Archeological Assistance Program" (1986), they maintain close liaison with other federal agencies to identify and plan needed archeological projects; assist federal agencies in planning for archeological resource preservation and management; offer technical assistance to other agencies in training, review of program documents, contracting and other activities; and investigate notifications that federal actions may destroy archeological data. And those are only "Archeological Assistance Field Operations" (there are more).

Would NPS archeologists want to abandon those responsibilities? Not the ones I talked to. Is the program of value to the nation? Of course. I believe NPS Science should explore the possibility of performing similar national service for living things. The Service's land base draws outside researchers now, often with benchmark studies of value to many other areas.

I suggest the concept of expansion needs thought, not only by NPS scientists and science administrators but by resource managers, rangers, superintendents and others both within and outside the Service. Maybe we should make "Parkery" an equivalent to "Forestry." Should expansion consist of an extension role and/or conduct of actual projects? Maybe expansion will happen (or won't happen) despite what we want. Maybe such things are only decreed from above in response to identified needs, not by design, but we can help with the identification. Maybe the Act of June 23, 1936 "To authorize a study of the park, parkway, and recreational-area programs in the United States, and for other purposes" provides at least partial authority. What do you think?

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