

NPS Responds to NPCA 'Global View' Report

By Napier Shelton

Because of the recent change in NPS leadership, it is too early to tell what effect the NPCA Commission's report, *From Vignettes to a Global View*, will have on NPS directions. Responses from former Director Mott and others suggest a trend of favorable reactions. People see the report as endorsing current programs while urging expanded efforts in certain areas.

It is recognized, however, that the latter would have a big price tag. Some of the major changes recommended are much increased educational activity beyond park boundaries, a legislative mandate and greatly increased funding for NPS research, and developing the ranger series (025) as a professional series to insure that park managers have a stronger background in resource management.

Mr. Mott's remarks at the March 19 symposium organized by NPCA for the Commission to present and discuss the report can be regarded as representative of the reactions of much of the NPS hierarchy. "Taken at the broadest level," Mott said, "I view the Commission's recommendations for education, research, ecosystem management, and professionalization as a strong endorsement of the direction the Park Service has been moving in recent years. While our progress may, perhaps, not have been as rapid or as great as the Commission might wish, it has not been insignificant and we are proud of the initiatives we have taken and the work we are doing within the funds available to us.

"All in all, I think we are generally in agreement with the Commission ... I would guess that probably our largest differences might center on the amount of additional resources (funds and people) we should put into

the activities the Commission stresses ... at a time when the government is operating at a substantial deficit ... we can't put a stop to all the other things we are doing in order to redirect our resources into the areas the Commission focused on ..."

John Dennis, acting chief of the science branch of the Washington Office Wildlife and Vegetation Division, probably reflects the views of many NPS scientists and resource managers when he says, "We need more park managers coming out of resource oriented career fields. Our future decision makers need a stronger background and understanding in resource management." But he sees increasing the focus of park managers on resources in contrast to visitors as involving a "major upheaval" within the Park Service.

The NPCA Commission report recommends that 35 percent of NPS research be autonomous from line management to ensure an independent and credible professional program. Dennis agrees with the concept that some portion of NPS research should be oriented more to park management philosophy and Servicewide policy concerns, but thinks that 10 to 15 percent might be a more appropriate proportion. Basic research, while not needing to have immediate application to management, "should be demonstrably related to multi-park and Servicewide management needs."

To some degree, the NPCA Commission chaired by John Gordon fulfilled the mission of the Blue Ribbon Panel called for in the Mott 12-Point Plan. But it was less specific in its guidance than the Panel was expected to be. The Task Directive drawn up for the proposed Blue Ribbon Panel asked questions such as: "How 'wild' and 'natural' can natural area parks be, and to what

extent must they be manipulated in the contemporary American landscape?" "Should 'featured' natural resources (e.g. grizzly bears, giant sequoias) be managed as ecosystem elements or as special resources deserving of protection in their own rights?" "At what level should NPS be conducting baseline inventories and monitoring resources?" "To what extent should NPS reflect present visitors' values?" The Gordon Commission did not directly address such specific questions.

The report has been sent to superintendents, regional directors, and the Washington Office directorate. Presumably it will have some influence on the direction the Service takes under Director Ridenour. One of the ideas in the new Director's April 17 (1989) paper, "Philosophical Thoughts on the National Park Service," suggests that he agrees with at least one of the expanded roles for the Park Service - in education - as propounded in the Gordon Commission report. Ridenour's thought No. 8 reads: "Just as the world has become a global economy, we are increasingly bound together in our environmental world. It is in our own self-interest that we show, by leadership and example, our strong commitment to environmental protection. We have the ability to influence global thinking on many important environmental issues."

The Gordon Commission report in essence urges the Park Service to take a more regional and global outlook. The Service welcomes this authoritative advice and will look for means to carry out many of the recommendations.

Shelton is a science and technology writer with the NPS Washington office.