

# Promoting Partnerships: The New NPS Challenge

By Sarah G. Bishop

*Editor's Note: Dr. Bishop is president of Partners in Parks, a non-profit organization that brings talented people to National Parks to work in partnership on projects of national significance. She was a member of the Commission which reviewed NPS research and resource management policy and signed the report, National Parks: From Vignettes to a Global View.*

After nearly a year of information gathering and deliberation, a Commission made up of 17 people from a diversity of backgrounds reported its findings in *National Parks: From Vignettes to a Global Vision*. What began as a review of the 25 year old "Leopold Report" ended as a confirmation of the basic National Park Service mission, with some added goals in research and education.

A major theme of the report is the need for parks to reach beyond their borders, both for assistance in meeting objectives and for building public understanding and support.

Perhaps the NPS's most far reaching partnership option is to join other federal agencies in the U.S. program of global change research. Government agencies in concert with others seek to establish a system to monitor and study the processes that cause change and to develop predictive models. All this effort will be meaningless if we lack the baseline knowledge of our biosphere and geosphere against which to measure change.

For terrestrial baseline research we need places that have been least disturbed by human activities as laboratories where research on global change can be accomplished. National Parks are those places. The Park Service must sit at the table with the agencies and organizations that will be conducting national research on global change and help write the research agenda that not only gives participating parks a fundamental resource inventory and sets up a monitoring system, but clearly defines an international need for research in parks. The best place to start would be in parks that are Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites.

The interagency Committee on Earth Sciences and the National Academy of Sciences Committee on Global Change will be developing detailed research plans in 1989. The Park Service must take this opportunity to become a player in global change by offering its lands as the best available sites for establishing baselines. The Service's reward will be a giant step forward in meeting its inventory and monitoring goals as well as developing a great deal of information, useful both for managing the parks and for developing comprehensive education programs.

Participating in global change research is just one aspect of working in partnership with others. Partnership opportunities exist for every national park. A number of in-place collaborative projects can and should be replicated.

One such partnership exists at Hawaii Volcanoes NP between the park and the US Geological Survey. The USGS maintains in the park a volcano observatory which the Park Service built for USGS. In exchange, the USGS has developed and helps the park maintain an exceptional interpretation center which informs visi-

tors of geological activity in the park, past, present and future.

At Shenandoah NP, several federal agencies are supporting research on topics ranging from controlling the spread of gypsy moths to measuring and determining the sources of acid precipitation. The park also provides logistical support for a number of independent researchers.

Another set of remarkable partnerships may be found at Golden Gate NRA. There the Fort Mason Center, the Golden Gate National Park Association and others sponsor hundreds of activities each month. So many volunteers are involved that almost everyone on the park staff is engaged in managing volunteer activities.

The Cave Research Foundation works in partnership with Mammoth Cave, Carlsbad Caverns, Guadalupe Mountains, Sequoia and Kings Canyon NPs, and several other NPS units surveying and conducting or supporting research on caves. This 30 year partnership has served both institutions well and has been cited by former NPS Director Mott as the model for melding NPS efforts with the work of private sector organizations.

Friends of Independence is a shining example of how a volunteer organization with highly skilled individuals can work collegially with a park. Friends are thoroughly integrated into the interpretation programs of the park, extending the park educational efforts far beyond what might be expected of a small staff. The Friends also have been invaluable in helping acquire historical objects for the park's collection.

A newly created non-profit organization, Partners in Parks, is dedicated to establishing partnerships that are technical or scientific in nature. The organization helps interested individuals and organizations gain access to national parks for the purpose of working on projects of national significance. It also helps national park managers accomplish major park goals and objectives. Partners' primary goal is to establish cooperative ventures between national park managers and private sector individuals and organizations working *pro bono* on their interests as well as on major park objectives. Where there are common goals and mutual interests, partnerships can thrive.

If national parks are to survive or better, thrive, they must have a knowledgeable, committed constituency. Partnerships can build public understanding and commitment to parks. Park managers who look outward will find partners who will join with them in protecting and preserving the treasures that are our heritage.

Each park must identify the community of which it is a part. The community may be as large as a region of one or more states, or as small as the nearest towns.



**Sarah Bishop discusses** *Partners in Parks* with Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument Supt. Harold Smith at the Superintendents' Conference at Grand Teton NP in May 1989.

Park managers who encourage community participation in park planning, development and implementation of programs and other activities will find willing partners.

In 1916 the people established the National Park Service and told its managers to be good stewards. The managers were in charge. The people did not have to pay attention; they were content then simply to visit from time to time these parks that were far from the every day world.

Now the every day world is encroaching on the parks. We visit in huge numbers, often concentrating our impact on small areas. Long distance threats such as acid rain and short distance threats such as subdivisions on park boundaries and upstream pollution force us to change the charge to the Park Service. We must all take responsibility for parks now.

If national parks are to thrive, they need knowledgeable, committed supporters. The partnership route offers the best hope for preservation of our cultural and natural heritage as embodied in the National Park System.

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