

Brown Paper Describes Beringian Park Proposal

In a stern, well-documented recital of global trends toward planetary catastrophe, Bill Brown of Denali National Park set forth for the recent George Wright Science in the Parks conference in Tucson the proposed Beringian international heritage park and its potential for "meshing the respective strengths (of the US and the USSR) in new syntheses for mutual benefit."

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The two kinds of readiness necessary are ideological acceptance of a need to do something and technological capability to do it. The “something” at hand is nothing less than saving ourselves as a species, and the National Park System, with its wideflung natural and cultural treasures and its interpretive function in place and respected, is peculiarly situated to give public awareness an educated boost.

The ancient land-bridge connection that made Alaska a peninsula of Asia endures to this day. Brown said, in the fields of physical, biological, and anthropological sciences. Recognizing the joint interests of the two countries, the Beringian Heritage Project – adopted in a 1987 protocol following reciprocal visits that year by US and Soviet delegations, “would open the way for joint scientific research, actively sponsored by the benefitting nations.”

Brown’s entire paper will be carried in a forthcoming issue of *The George Wright FORUM*. His final paragraphs contain this vision:

“In broader perspective, the National Park System comprehends a spectrum of natural and cultural areas reaching from the tropics to the high arctic, from Maine to the Marianas. Unless the global trends warnings we have so far received prove unreal – an unlikely event – it is inevitable that our government, in concert with others, will be forced to mount Manhattan Project equivalents to stem the rising waters, control energy emissions, curb the poisons that Nature has finally refused to absorb.

“In pursuit of these massive tasks, key sites within our National Park System and allied conservation units, and in equivalent reserves of other nations, surely will function as monitoring, research, and experimental centers. They will record levels and changes, pinpoint sources, and provide the scientific knowledge that can translate into reform and restructuring of current destructive practices. In this international mosaic of sites, the national parks of the United States will be critical benchmarks, standards by which deviations from or recovery toward healthy environments can be measured.

“As steward of these natural laboratories and data bases, the National Park Service must begin now to prepare itself for a key leadership role in scientific and social affairs, nationally and internationally, based on the geographies of hope that it is privileged to manage.

“Given all this, and with regret that grim necessity is its cause, I yet believe that this institution may be on the brink of resuscitation. Lord knows we need it. We need a cause that will restore and requite the bruised idealism of this honorable Service. We need to be valued again in our own society. We’ve always measured that value by the service we could render. I believe we’ll have the opportunity to render more service than we’ve ever rendered before.”