

Superintendent's Corner

Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area is a 69,000 acre unit of the National Park System receiving over 2.5 million visits per year. Outdoor recreation opportunities abound, including; canoeing, rafting, fishing, hunting, hiking, and sightseeing. These uses are dependent upon the preservation of a variety of outstanding National resources including: a segment of the Appalachian Trail, a unit of the Wild and Scenic River System, geological features such as the Delaware Water Gap, outstanding wildlife including a growing population of Bald Eagle, over 83 sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and an abundance of historic and prehistoric archeological sites.

The safety of the public and the protection of these outstanding resources are entirely dependent upon the behavior of visitors and adjacent residents of the area. In recent years we have undertaken a number of social science studies to understand the backgrounds, values, and motivations of different user groups within the NRA. The information from this research is vital for us to determine how best to communicate the importance of the resources within the NRA, the opportunities that exist for outstanding recreation, how to use the NRA safely and, most importantly, how to use it with care and respect.

Projects such as an appropriate river recreation use study, a hunter survey, and the Visitor Services Project Survey have all contributed significantly to our management decisions and planning. It is time, however, to *regularize* our approach to understanding the park visitor. We need to take stock of the data we have collected and where studies still need to be undertaken. Equally important, we need to understand clearly where these types of efforts cannot significantly assist us.

During FY90 we are undertaking the development of a social science research plan for the NRA in cooperation with Dr. Gary Machlis. With funding resources always scarce, and given the inexact nature of social science, it is critical to have a comprehensive and carefully considered approach to this research.

Major and continuing efforts to understand our visitors are long overdue in the National Park Service. We can ill afford to employ the social sciences without a carefully considered and long-term commitment. We hope that a social science research plan will be the vehicle to accomplish this objective.

Richard G. Ring, Superintendent
Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area