

A Superintendent Says YES!

In the early years of the National Park Service Stephen Mather dealt directly with park neighbors. Frustrated with Great Northern's procrastination at removing a "temporary" sawmill in Glacier NP, Mather assigned a trail crew to blow it up. Today, however, the world is more complicated; such "quick fix" solutions are sure to generate more problems than they solve.

Although methods may have changed, the need for interaction between parks and their neighbors has grown. All of today's park managers and employees need to expand their vision, knowledge and expertise over the boundary fence and become directly involved in the issues of nearby communities. We can better preserve our national treasures by taking a leadership role in protecting ecosystems, landscapes and waterways whether or not we own them. When we protect the region from the adverse impacts of acid rain, we protect our parks. When we help manage visitor impacts on neighboring communities, we in fact manage visitor impacts within our parks. When we recognize that parks are an integral part of the national and international tourist industry, we can better articulate why our parks are important in local and regional economies. When we emphasize that parks are educational resources, increase their use for scholarly pursuits, illuminate their historical and scientific value, then we establish the parks as unique and vital entities in the

communities in which they are located.

Acadia NP is intimately linked with the communities of Mt. Desert Island. Dr. Manning's study has documented and illuminated many of these relationships. We are reassured that Acadia is perceived as a good neighbor in many ways. However, there is room for improvement. Since completion of this study we have worked in several ways to further improve our relationships with surrounding communities. A few samples include:

- Our general management plan leader has moved to the park making a long term commitment to learn and understand park issues and their implications on the region's economy and quality of life.
- The park's advisory commission (which has representation from 10 towns as well as state and federal appointees) has been directly involved in the general management plan process.
- The park participates actively in the Mount Desert Island League of Towns (comprised of the managers of the four communities on Mount Desert Island and the Superintendent of Acadia). The League has identified five problems of islandwide significance and is acting cooperatively to seek solutions. These problems include solid waste management, affordable housing, property tax relief, regional planning, and water resources.

- The park actively serves on the University of Maine Forest Resources Research Advisory Commission, which sets the agenda for the University's resource management and wildlife research programs.
- The park serves on the Eastern Maine Development Commission Tourism Advisory Council which develops recommendations on tourism management issues for eastern Maine.
- The park helped in establishment of monthly informal breakfasts with the Superintendent, President of the College of the Atlantic, Director of Jackson Laboratories, Superintendent of public schools, Coast Guard Base Commander, Director of Mount Desert Island hospital, and the four town managers.
- A number of park staff serve on selected municipal conservation and planning committees.

Based on our experiences I can report both promises and pitfalls as a result of increased interaction with surrounding communities. The effort may tax one's nervous system, strain financial and staff resources, and encourage accusations of "federal interference." However it can also add vitality and excitement to an organization's blood that some feel has grown thin. Ultimately, it is the only way to ensure preservation of Acadia NP and Mt. Desert Island as well.

Jack Hauptman, Superintendent
Acadia National Park