

A Pertinent Letter from Alaska?

The word "inventory" is a downer. To inventory furniture and equipment against property lists is biologically sterile and intellectually boring unless something expensive turns up missing – resulting in sheer terror (another negative).

The sign in the store window, "Closed for Inventory," means tediously counting stock down to the last nut and bolt, usually so it can be taxed (also an unpleasantry).

Once, NPS tried Resource Basic Inventory (RBI), in an attempt to find out everything about everything in a park. That made even the strongest scientists blanch and it curled the upper lips of superintendents and rangers. I know. I was there!

Monitoring, however, is the life blood of an agency. We monitor animal populations, wildland fires, bear, human interactions, livestock grazing, weather conditions, visitor statistics, sewage treatments, pesticide uses, law violations, salaries and leave times, ad infinitum. Data gathering is necessary for monitoring, but when was the last time you heard it called "inventory"? Of 183 Areas of Expertise listed in the NPS Natural

Resources Personnel Directory (printed in 1988), only once – in "Baseline Inventory and Monitoring," was the word "inventory" included.

Management, on the other hand, was mentioned 37 times, which shows where the money is. And of 624 people in the directory, only 14 mentioned inventorying as one of their specialties.

The problem remains: We badly need Inventory and Monitoring and we aren't getting it. Blaming part of the problem on a word may seem simplistic, but I'm not sure it is. The primary reason I&M has not worked, in my opinion, is that it is aimed at the future, while we want – or have – to focus on today's problems and needs. The recent revival of interest in I&M (NPS-75) is an attempt to break away from the work-a-day world to gather data about baselines and changes – needed for future decisions.

Is that important? How else can we determine what we have, and manage to leave it unimpaired for generations to come, while at the same time providing for its enjoyment?

But I repeat, the name doesn't help. "Inventory," with

its suggestion of trying to find out *everything*, is discouraging. Do I have an alternative? Does Alaska have snow and ice?

My solution is: Just call it "natural resource monitoring." Natural Resource Monitoring should be a full partner with Natural Resource Research and Natural Resource Management. It would be the repositor and collator for the wealth of information obtained by Research and Management, would ask those functions to gather whenever possible data not needed for immediate problem solving (against future needs), and be staffed and equipped to get additional data.

What's in a name? Lots! For example, NPS employees rarely talk about "working for a government bureau," or call themselves "bureaucrats." What chance would an Edsel have today, even without the toilet seat, in a world full of Cougars, Cavaliers, Corsicas, Conquests, or even my own little Dodge Colt (which is really a Mitsubishi)? How about the Peacekeeper Missiles and Freedom Fighters of the last Administration? We really *need* Inventory and Monitoring, so let's drop the negative word, accentuate the positive one, and get on with the job.

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