

The Natural Resources Publication Program: What is it?

By Donna O'Leary

The Natural Resources Publication Program is a result of an initiative that began in earnest in 1987. It was in response to a request from the Chief Scientists to the Associate Director, Natural Resources (AD/NR), to improve the quality and ensure the credibility of NPS natural resources publications. The initiative began with numerous questions. Within the natural resource organizations, who was producing what? How many and what kinds of series existed? Who were the audiences? How were publications being reviewed? Who was accountable for approving reports?

To answer these questions and others, a survey was conducted on natural resource publications produced in FYs 1985 and 1986 and those proposed for 1987. The findings were most informative. Washington divisions and offices, regional offices, cooperative park studies units, and parks, together were disseminating an average of 148 reports/year through 15 series. The extent of reviews and the exercise of quality control varied from series to series. Most of the publications differed in appearance, format, series numbering systems, and distribution. No database information was available. No process existed for selecting publication projects. The publication situation was fragmented and lacked a coordinate direction, purpose, and focus.

To review and evaluate this information and to recommend improvements, the AD/NR set up a natural resources task force of scientists, resource managers including a superintendent, and editors. They met first in 1988. During the same period in 1988, and parallel to the natural resources publication initiative, the Director requested that a workshop of NPS editors and publishers be conducted to review and evaluate the entire NPS publication program and to recommend improvements. Most of the issues identified at the workshop were the same issues of concern for natural resource publications, including the following: "The natural resource publication program requires priority focus because of its present fragmentation."

The natural resources task force concluded that a comprehensive publication program was needed to provide a Servicewide function in disseminating information on natural resources through publication. To meet this objective, the task force recommended that (1) only a small number of series be used: six series disseminated at the national (Servicewide) level and three of the six at the regional level; (2) a publications coordination function be formalized; (3) a formal selection process be instituted for publication projects; (4) an advisory board be established to continue making program recommendations to the AD/NR and Chief Scientists; (5) a bibliographic database be generated and maintained for new publications; and (6) a policy and procedural handbook be developed to consolidate existing Departmental and other authorities and regulations and to provide additional guidance where needed.

(Continued on back cover)

Based on these recommendations, and after extensive field review, the AD/NR approved *The Final Plan For Designing and Operating the National Park Service Natural Resources Publication Program* in March 1989. The approved plan established the foundation of the publication program. The "nuts and bolts" of the program would evolve over the next two years of implementing recommendations for the plan and writing, reviewing, and revising the procedural handbook.

How has the program evolved and what is it today?

The program, under the administration of the AD/NR, provides a coordinated direction, purpose, and focus for disseminating natural resource information through (1) NPS natural resource publications, (2) other NPS publications, and (3) publications outside the NPS.

Five NPS report series and the quarterly **Park Science** bulletins are available at the national level to disseminate natural resources information. The five report series are the Scientific Monographs, Transactions and Proceedings, Technical Reports, annual Science Reports, and Natural Resources Reports. The AD/NR funds and approves manuscripts disseminated through the national report series. The Publications Coordinator coordinates the selection and approval processes and the editorial and publishing services. Three of the six series are available at the regional level to disseminate natural resource information. The three report series are the Technical Reports, annual Science Reports, and Natural Resources Reports. These series are optional; some regions may use all three, others only one. Approval authority for a regional series is at a Regional Director's discretion. No other natural resource series may be used or developed, and parks must disseminate information through an established natural resource series at a regional office or a cooperative park studies unit.

Some of the common program elements which link the national and regional series are: (1) National and regional series are managed in accordance with publication management and printing authorities, statutes, and regulations. (2) Both levels of series are managed under the same objectives, management strategies, and general publication policy. (3) Each series is clearly defined as to the purpose, audience, content, type of review, format, and review procedures, with each having a consistent series numbering system and an NPS reference number. (4) Identical information is presented on the covers, the inside front covers, the title pages, and the inside back covers for each series report, national and regional.

What has the program accomplished so far?

The planning process that allows for competing needs, long-term scheduling (for editing, reviewing, producing, and printing), and long-term budgeting for national series has been successfully implemented, and manuscripts published, since last year. Funding also has been provided for page charges and reprints to support scientists publishing in outside journals. The Advisory Board, formerly the task force, has met every year since the initiative began; it recently addressed the issues of the new NPS Science Editorial Review Committee and priorities for program resources. The Technical Information Center at the Denver Service Center maintains a bibliographic database for natural resource publications; and a procedural handbook, following extensive reviews, has finally been completed.

Almost everything you wanted to know, but until now were afraid to ask, about disseminating natural resource information through publication is contained in the **Natural Resources Publication Management Handbook**, including guidelines for NPS publications outside the NPS. Completing this handbook is a significant accomplishment and would not have been possible without the continued support and contributions of the Chief Scientists, the Advisory Board, and dozens of reviewers.

The handbook is available from the Chief Scientists or the Publication Coordinator, Natural Resources Publication Office, P.O. Box 25287, Denver, CO 80225-0287; (FTS) 327-2156 or (303) 969-2156.

O'Leary is NPS Publications Coordinator.