

Keystone Dialogue On Biological Diversity On Federal Lands Goes to Field

By John Dennis

In mid-April, 1991, The Keystone Center published its *Final Consensus Report of the Keystone Policy Dialogue on Biological Diversity on Federal Lands*, which provides the results of a 2-year multidisciplinary dialogue on biological diversity. In a June 21 memorandum, NPS Acting Director Herb Cables distributed the report to NPS senior managers and superintendents and strongly urged them to consider its findings and examine their own programs with respect to its recommendations.

The report's central thesis is that maintaining biological diversity on all federal lands is important. To establish the basis and urgency of its recommendations, the report provides information on the value of biological diversity to humans, the problems that impede its conservation, the criticality of federal lands to maintaining this diversity, and the key role that humans play. The report defines biological diversity as:

- The variety of life and its processes, including the variety of living organisms, genetic differences among them, and communities and ecosystems where they occur.

It identifies factors causing the loss of biological diversity to include actual and threatened extinctions of genotypes, populations, and entire species; loss of plant and animal habitats; spread of exotic species; and loss of natural biological communities. It suggests a national goal:

- To conserve, protect, and restore biological diversity on federal lands to sustain the health of the ecological systems, to provide for human well-being, and because of the intrinsic value of biological diversity.

The report also encourages federal agencies to coordinate their programs and to cooperate in conducting program evaluation, inventory, monitoring, research, data management, information transfer, planning, and budgeting activities that respond to the recommended goal. It discusses the need for identifying indicators of success to help people understand what conditions are desired and when the desired conditions are being achieved. It recognizes that achieving these recommendations may require additional funding and personnel.

It recommends specifically that each federal land management agency and each agency conducting activities on federal lands should pursue strategies cumulatively to meet all of the following seven related objectives:

- Maintain viable populations of the nation's native plants and animals well distributed throughout their geographic range.

- Maintain natural genetic variability within and among populations of native species.

- Maintain representative examples of the full spectrum of ecosystems, biological communities, habitats and their ecological processes.

- Increase scientific understanding of biological diversity and conservation.

- Achieve public awareness and understanding of biological diversity.

- Enable and encourage the private sector to develop and apply innovative approaches to the conservation of biological diversity.

In addition, it recommends that agencies should develop and implement mechanisms for coordination, including forming a Federal Biological Diversity Policy and Coordination Committee.

The report provides specific discussion and recommendations on such program topics as maintaining viable populations of native species; maintaining genetic variability; maintaining ecosystems, biological communities, habitats, and ecological processes; integrating conservation of biological diversity with other human needs; increasing scientific understanding; achieving public awareness and understanding; and encouraging private sector involvement.

Also, the report provides information about the five federal land managing organizations, including the National Park Service, that are responsible for managing most of the federal land holdings. Similarly, the report gives a synopsis of the Environmental Protection Agency and The Nature Conservancy. It offers information about the USFWS's "Gap Analysis" process, contains background information about genetic diversity and the relationship of selected biological traits to relative endangerability, and provides a glossary of terms.

The Keystone Policy Dialogue on Biological Diversity on Federal Lands involved personnel from federal agencies, Congressional staffs, environmental organizations, commodity organizations, private industry, and academia. Although supported by their parent organizations, these dialogue participants acted individually, not as representatives of their organizations.

NPS participants listed in the final report include John Byrne, Superintendent of the George Washington Memorial Parkway, now Project Manager, Appalachian Trail; John Dennis, Chief of the Science Branch, Wildlife and Vegetation Division, NPS Washington Office (WASO), and Mike Ruggiero, Chief, Wildlife and Vegetation Division, WASO.

Copies of the report may be purchased for \$20 from The Keystone Center, PO Box 606, Keystone, CO 80435 (303)468-5822.