

To the Editor:

As one who was lucky enough to be a participant in the Vail symposium, I read your editorial in the Winter 1992 issue with interest. I am in general agreement with the cautious optimism you expressed. Others, however, do not share this point of view.

Dr. Roderick Nash, one of the Service's most articulate critics yet ardent supporters, has expressed his disappointment in the recommendations of the symposium. He feels that the symposium participants missed the opportunity to articulate a strong National Park Service commitment to something Nash labels "planetary modesty."

Dr. Nash describes planetary modesty as a recognition that human beings are not the only passengers on Spaceship Earth. We must, Nash argues, live in harmony with nature because we have no more right to dominate nature than we do to dominate another individual. Aspens, canyons, periphyton, and all the other components of our ecosystem have a right to exist, not merely because of their value to us, but because they are an integral part of the world in which we all live.

This is revolutionary stuff – rocks have rights! – and the NPS is the perfect agency to pitch this vision to its visitors if only we have the courage to adopt it.

As is Nash, I am disappointed that we didn't take a stronger stand about the NPS and its potential role as a leader in resource stewardship. The Service seldom leads from the front. When was the last time we took a strong stand on major environmental issues such as overgrazing of public lands, irresponsible mineral development, or the failure to add to the nation's Wilderness Preservation System? When was the last time we told the ORV people to take a hike? We are going to be eaten alive by groups such as People for the West if we are not able to demonstrate where we stand, in stark contrast to what they are advocating.

Finally, quoting the environmental leadership section, while I applaud the concept of "leading by example," what examples are we going to demonstrate? We aren't progressive about recycling, we don't design for energy efficiency or site compatibility, we don't promote the use of alternatives to fossil fuels, we don't do much about getting visitors out of their cars, we favor commercial interests over private users in such areas as river permit allocations, we allow snowmobiles and outboard motors in pristine places such as Voyagers and Grand Canyon, we permit development in major resource areas, we spend more money fighting drugs than ARPA violations, we urge our superintendents to do more with less when we should have the courage to tell them to do less with less, and every year we lose ground in the preservation and protection of cultural resources.

It's not a pretty picture.

Rick Smith, Associate Regional Director
National Park Service Southwest Region

To the Editor:

The Winter 1992 issue of *Park Science* contained an editorial reporting excitement that the 75th Anniversary Symposium focused in a tough, no-nonsense, and very specific way on the need for organizational change in the NPS. Hope was expressed that real action will result.

There are good reasons to be hopeful, for top management is listening and the political system appears supportive of action. But Rome wasn't built in a day,

and broad reforms will only come about over time. Just as *Park Science* urged its readers to get involved to shape the report, I would urge all employees to learn about the Symposium, become advocates, and look to participate directly in the implementation process now evolving.

The preliminary draft of the Symposium report contains major recommendations for reform and dramatic characterizations of agency problems. Describing the Service as "beset by controversy, concern, and weakened morale within," it reports that the Symposium "revealed a deeply disturbing sense that the nation is risking a deterioration of its natural and cultural heritage that not even the most dedicated personnel can effectively prevent." It observes that:

"Perceptions exist among many employees – and not without bases in reality – that good job performance is impeded by lowered educational requirements and eroding professionalism, that initiative is thwarted by inadequately trained managers and politicized decision making, that the Park Service lacks the information and research capability it needs to stand up for itself in Washington, DC, and in the communities that surround the park units, that the mission and the budget of the Service is being diluted by increasing and tangential responsibilities, that there is a mismatch between the demand that the park units be protected and the tools available when the threats to protection are increasingly coming from outside unit boundaries, and that communication within the Service repeatedly breaks down between field personnel and regional and headquarters management that lack or have no recent field experience."

It should be good news to your readers that the report states: "Science and research should form the foundation from which the NPS asserts itself as proactive leader." But, it observes, the Service is "extraordinarily deficient in its capacity to generate, acquire, synthesize, act upon, and articulate to the public sound research and scientific information." To remedy this, it recommends increasing the number of research and resource management professionals, a legislative mandate for research, and new funding.

The report also recommends expanding interpretation and educational outreach, revamping training programs, developing new human resource policies, and moving immediately to reform the park ranger series. Director Ridenour and Dep. Dir. Cables have begun organizing to act on the report, which is due in Washington about the time *Park Science* goes to press. A team of senior and mid-level field and Washington personnel has been appointed to propose strategies to implement recommendations, which must first be prioritized for action.

It appears certain that implementation will involve the use of many task and planning groups to develop the action strategies to address the issues. The Director's concept is to involve employees Servicewide in the effort. Team members will recommend these people, and I suggest you contact them and volunteer to participate. Team members are:

Bob Barbee, Maria Burks, Diane Dayson, John Debo, Mike Finley, Maureen Finnerty, Denny Galvin, Paul Haertel, Wallace Hibbard, Steve Kesselman, Ernest Ortega, Stan Ponce, Dick Powers, John Reynolds, Dick Ring, Rick Smith, and Kate Stevenson.

Dick Marks, Nancy Nelson, and I are providing staff support to the Deputy Director, who is leading this

effort. We will help coordinate the groups and do what we can to keep things moving along. This is an exciting, hopeful moment in our history. We are receiving a high profile, prestigious document that calls for fundamental change to strengthen and expand the reach of this great organization. We have much to say about making it happen.

Loran Fraser

75th Anniversary Staff Coordinator

*Editor's Note: For another slant on the Vail Conference, see the article by Bill Brown, retired NPS historian, in the current issue of the George Wright Society **FORUM** (Vol. 8 No. 4).*