

Editorial

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Recently Secretary Babbitt has identified the need for a national focal point for biological information -- a National Biological Survey -- perhaps similar to the U.S. Geological Survey for physical resources and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration for weather information.

The concept involves the collection, analysis, and dissemination of biological information by a research organization without management responsibilities to maintain objective, credible information not driven by an individual bureau's management decisions.

Biological inventories and research are located in nearly every bureau in government. By consolidating resources to provide a more coordinated and systematic approach to understanding the status and trends of the nation's biological resources, we should be able to anticipate such things as threatened ecosystems. Increasingly there is a recognition that ecological problems cannot be resolved on a single issue or a single species

basis, but must be addressed on an ecosystem basis. Early recognition of ecosystem problems should enable agencies to identify more options for resolution than when the problems are identified by such things as petitions to list endangered species at the eleventh hour.

Implementation of this concept within the Interior Department requires many important decisions as to which present financial and manpower resources could be consolidated into this new National Biological Survey organization. This requires an analysis of which resources are essential to bureau missions and local day-to-day management decisions, and which could appropriately be devoted to the new organization to address the broader ecosystem and national needs. Developing standardized approaches to data collection and data management is an essential part of this new concept.

Options for developing this new concept have been formulated. The National Park Service has much to offer and much to gain from this initiative.