

Service Reviews Effectiveness Of Resource Management Plans

By Steve Cinnamon, Adrienne Anderson, and Karen Rhem

A workshop on resource management plan (RMP) guidelines was held in Tucson, AZ, in early March to evaluate the existing process and guidelines and to make recommendations for their improvement. All Regions were represented by personnel who have responsibility for resource management planning activities.

Six parks, and staff representing all Regions, were involved in presentations and panel sessions on subjects including park programs, park, regional, and Washington office use of the RMP, role of RMP in planning and budget cycles, compliance concerns, and the software developed to capture Servicewide issues and needs.

It became apparent from the outset that not all Regions are using the plans effectively or in a consistent manner. The initial session on the history of RMPs indicated mediocre compliance with the 1981 guidelines. A review of the current status of the approved RMPs underlined the problem. It appeared to participants that for the most part the Service has not taken seriously the task of writing and following RMPs. As of December 1992, only 43 RMPs had been approved Servicewide. However, current information indicates that 220 Plans are in various stages of revision. The March 1989 guidelines held that all Plans were to be updated within the 4-year period.

Two key sessions were Mac Brock's (VOYA) presentation on how a park could use an RMP effectively, and Charles Van Riper III's step-down process, used to identify various program entities that need to be accomplished to achieve an end result. These two sessions demonstrated that resource problems are divided amongst various program area responsibilities; they were cited throughout the workshop as examples of how RMPs could be used effectively.

Central office support for RMPs is provided on the natural resource side by Jen Coffey in the WASO (Washington Office) Wildlife and Vegetation Division, and on the cultural resource side by Laura Feller in the WASO History Division. The WASO natural and cultural resource staffs are working together to support Regions and parks in RMP policy development and review. As awareness of resource management has increased, the importance of RMPs as the foundation on which resource management programs are built is being realized.

As regional representatives discussed tactics to implement the 1989 guidelines, it was apparent that the Southeast Region's approach to complete scoping sessions and to keep parks on a timetable has been effective. The scoping process, amended from that described by NEPA, has been applied with some success in six Regions. Regions that have not applied the scoping process, intend to try this approach.

The value of the RMP was discussed at a panel session with park, regional, and Washington office representatives. Some presented the RMP as a budget document, with brief narratives describing the problem and proposed action. These views were countered with perspectives that the Plans are keystone documents for the parks. The parks' resource management programs should be the heart of the Plans. The Plans serve several purposes: as an institutional memory; as a document reviewed by the public, researchers, and various agencies; and as a park program document reviewed by park management and fiscal managers.

The Plan has been project oriented with the problem statements reflecting how ecosystems are disrupted and how natural resource communities are jeopardized. Rather than brief narratives typically associated with budget documents, it was proposed that the Plan narratives be complete enough to describe why the resources are in the condition they are in; the narrative describing the park's strategy should be detailed enough to match the complexity of the resource issue. Current use of the RMP as a budget driven document competes with the view that the document should provide a programmatic approach to management of our resources. The various regional approaches to the use of 10-238s and outline of park planning requirements (OPRs) indicate that as a Service we are not on the same interstate highway. Instead, we are analogous to a number of frontage roads at various distances from the thoroughfare.

If the Service is to begin to consolidate the resource needs to meet its management objectives, focus should be realigned to emphasize the importance of the RMP as a tactical and strategic planning document. The Plan is used by a variety of people who have different data needs and interests. The Plan and project statements must serve as the institutional memory and be the environmental conscience driving park management.

Participants were reminded that the Plan is the central document that reflects the park's tactical and strategic plan for resource management. The project statements reflect problems facing our resources. The majority of the project statements on natural resources reflect "violations" of basic ecological principles. Habitats no longer are intact; populations are fragmented and unable to sustain themselves; air and water quality have deteriorated to the point that basic requirements for organisms or ecosystems to sustain themselves cannot be met. These conditions reinforce the observation that the park RMPs are rooted in conservation biology principles. As these principles are further violated, it will be more critical to look at management strategies to preserve the resources for future generations.

For cultural resource managers, the RMP Workshop was a thought provoking look at future management trends being developed for natural resources with an eye to applying them to management of the vast array of cultural resources in the National Park System. After extensive discussion, a consensus was reached that the R-MAP (Resource Management Assessment Program) process, developed by the Western Region (which develops sub-programs relating to resource needs), could provide programmatic direction for RMP development. The R-MAP staffing requirements relate to the personnel on hand and provide managers with a unique opportunity to visualize their staffing needs. While it is unclear whether WASO will develop a R-MAP program for cultural resources, there are several possibilities for expanding the use of integrated management techniques in addressing cultural and natural issues through the RMP process.

The Vail Agenda identified the need for natural and cultural resource management to work together in addressing the urgent needs and potential threats affecting the special places under our stewardship. The RMP can be the tool to implement a stewardship program based on the resources, rather than on personal preferences. Perhaps the most valuable insight gained was that there is common ground where natural and cultural resources can meet and provide a better future for all.

Walt Sydorik (software contractor), Lincoln Fairchild (computer specialist, Cultural Resources), and Tim Goddard (computer specialist, Wildlife and Vegetation Division) presented a session on software development

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and the most recent versions thereof. The software has strength to meet many WASO or regional needs, yet does not lend itself well to park requirements for an attractive public document. The recent improvements include expanded reporting capabilities that will aid management inquiries and budget calls. Park people in attendance reminded the group that the software still needs betterment in order to meet their needs.

Workshop results emphasize improving existing guidelines and procedures. First, the software revision process will be bettered. A "software testing team" will review and test future versions of the software before they are released. A "software development team" will analyze feedback and set priorities for future software enhancements required by parks and Regions. A "technical support team" will be formulated to provide detailed software support for all users, via telephone or electronic mail.

Cinnamon represented the Midwest Region; Anderson, the Rocky Mountain Region, and Rhem, the Southeast Region.

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