

Working with Williams in WASO

By Sarah Allen

In July 1993, I began working in the Western Regional Office with two primary duties: coordinating both the biological inventory and monitoring program and the threatened and endangered species program. I am not only new to the Western Region, but also to the Park Service. I have studied in and around parks for the past 18 years, but this hardly prepared me for the labyrinth of places, people, forms and procedures.

The trip to WASO was by invitation from Dr. Gary Williams, Manager for the Inventory & Monitoring (I&M) Program. Gary had a check list, at least up to my elbow, of various tasks from which I could select. I chose defining and fleshing out the duties of the I&M regional coordinator. My primary reason for being in WASO, though, was to meet the staff with whom I have, and will have, working relations.

I arrived at Dulles airport with many preconceptions. The first was that temperatures are arctic in mid-November on the east coast. When I departed from home near San Francisco early Sunday morning, I had had to scrape ice off the car window, but when I arrived in Dulles that evening, temperatures were warm and due to be still warmer the next day. A second fallacy was that Washington was a swollen and sluggish bureaucracy. Instead I was greeted by a devoted, bustling staff with little time for small talk. I have seen this motivation throughout the Park Service—the ability to do a lot with very little. People work long hours with short breaks and come in on weekends. One down side, though, is that I found little opportunity to socialize with staff; I would have delighted in relaxed conversations outside of the office where we could escape interruptions from phones and people. Rather than leave the overtures to WASO staff, I would encourage any new visitor to take the initiative and corner a hapless victim for lunch or a walk to the Smithsonian.

The Washington Office actually is two offices; the main offices of Interior are on C Street; the Vegetation and Wildlife group is a few miles away near the Capital building. A shuttle service cycles between the two offices several times each day. This convenience was particularly appreciated because I had been warned that walking around the Capital can be a dangerous exercise. Everyone, from ho-

tel clerks to taxis drivers, exhorted me not to venture out after dark. One evening, though, I found a bevy of labor union protesters marching to a rally on the Hill, so I joined them for protection and a bit of sightseeing.

I had never before been in Washington, so I spent some time orienting to the city and locating offices and personnel. This pastime proved very rewarding. All whom I approached were more than willing to interrupt their tasks to help orient a newcomer. This was particularly true at the NPS Vegetation and Wildlife office, where I spoke with all who were not out of town.

I also made an effort to get out for lunch and stroll around the Capital to visit monuments such as the Lincoln and Vietnam War Memorials. The grounds around the monuments were very clean, with little trash or graffiti, and I reflected with some pride that NPS personnel were responsible for the pristine appearance of the grounds—a condition that added significantly to the overall visual and aesthetic impression.

Several points may be helpful to the new arrival to WASO. Foremost, find out in advance what sort of office accommodations will be available to you including space, phone and computer access. Gary Williams provided a small, neat desk from which to work, and I was fortunate when a staff member who was going to be absent for a week kindly offered use of her office. Being fairly picky about computer programs, I brought my own lap-top machine. An additional benefit was few phone interruptions since I was away from home duties. Having all the tools of my home office and privacy too increased my productivity and significantly shortened the "settling in" process. Rose, the secretary, was especially attentive. She made sure I was comfortable, knew where to find things (such as the FAX) and had all needed supplies.

Finally, a week is the minimum time for a Washington stint, and a longer stay is better. I was just becoming comfortable with the ways of WASO when my visit was over.

Gary Williams has just issued a call to all Regions offering an opportunity to visit WASO on detail to work in the I&M Program. He proffers several tasks to attract participants. Now is your chance!

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