

George Wright Conference Sustains Interest

Exploring the theme of sustainability in society and protected areas, the George Wright Society Eighth Conference on Research and Resource Management In Parks and on Public Lands provided valuable discussions on this all-important ideal at a time when environmental protection is being deemphasized and associated laws may be potentially scaled back. With more than 425 people in attendance, the April meeting brought together public and private lands scientists, resource managers, administrators, and other natural and cultural resource leaders for the presentation or attendance of numerous poster sessions and nearly 100 presentations. Five concurrent tracks organized the presentations according to their

relevance to the following different aspects of sustainability: sustainable protected area management, planning for use and management, integrating cultural and natural resource management, applying science and technology, or ecosystem management. Three plenary sessions, a day of field trips, an awards banquet, and unlimited opportunities to visit amongst the participants rounded out the valuable and enjoyable four days.

Opening the conference with a presentation that was to become its centerpiece was Oregon State University Professor George Stankey. Speaking on the social foundations of sustainability, Stankey assessed our present standing and what we must do to move beyond the current stagnant, even regressive, times. He described sustainability as a philosophical construct that helps society set standards to live by; he also noted that our ideals must be translated into a public discourse that transcends our ideological ignorance and prompts action to reverse our resource- (and self-) destructive ways. Other highlights included a passionate and logical appeal to environmentally responsible land management practices by the Chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla (Oregon) Indian Reservation, National Biological Service Director Pulliam's honesty about and hopes for his agency, and Deputy Director Reynolds' call for exemplary NPS actions and operations.

In contrast to these, the majority of presentations simply reflected research and resource management work at hand on our public lands. Scientists, resource managers, and land administrators seem to know the importance and practicality of staying focused on projects that create results at home. In this regard, sessions touched on fire management practices, exotic species control and vegetation restoration projects, visitor experience assessment methods and use planning, managing visitor impacts, tourism, international cooperation, the implications of historic Native American impacts on resource management activities, and recent examples of ecosystem management efforts, among many, many others. Making a difference in one's own sphere of influence on furthering the principles of sustainability was perhaps the biggest take home message from the conference.

As usual, the conference covered National Park Service concerns and system areas well and boosted science and resource management communications. Forty-one papers are published in a volume available from the George Wright Society (call Bob Linn or Dave Harmon at ((906) 487-9722). The ninth such conference is planned for Albuquerque, New Mexico, in March 1997.

A longer review of the conference by William E. Brown can be found in the summer George Wright Forum (volume 12, no. 2), which should be circulated in early July.