

KEYSTONE CENTER MEETING ON ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

By KAREN WADE

FOR THE PAST YEAR, DR. John Dennis of the NPS Natural Systems Management Office and I have participated in a series of meetings sponsored by the Keystone Center (see sidebar) entitled "The National Dialogue on Ecosystem Management." Fifty people from diverse places and viewpoints are exploring the possibility of achieving consensus on whether ecosystem management offers a realistic new process within which to design and implement policies and decisions affecting natural resources. Represented are academics, agency bureaucrats and scientists, ranchers and forest products executives, and advocates from institutions as diverse as The Nature Conservancy, the Wilderness Society, and the Farm Bureau. Three of four plenary sessions have been completed and supplemented by break-out meetings organized as field trips to look at examples of ecosystem management. The latest meeting, held in Chicago early last November, was largely devoted to constructing the basic outline of a final product to be completed at the final plenary this March.

This dialogue was largely generated by the recognition that contemporary institutions and concepts are not capable of resolving the cross-boundary issues raised by our new understanding of natural systems and the increasing conflicts over scarce natural resources. In earlier meetings we defined "boundaries" not only as the obvious physical, natural, and political boundaries, but also those created by narrow academic disciplines, rigid property rights and tax codes, outdated economics, legal doctrines, antiquated managerial and institutional structures.

In all of our meetings, we have been privileged to be able to confer with those in our group who can articulate the growing sense of disenfranchisement expressed in grassroots rebellions. Grassroots rebellions are not only producing an agenda for the political process, but also generat-

ing interest in landscape level solutions created in a nonconfrontational, voluntary consortium of affected parties. The investigation of this phenomenon is what has brought us together and, we hope, will result in a clear articulation of the benefits of the approach and what might be done to actually strengthen it.

In order to define these landscape level management efforts, we have observed various examples believing that the definition lies in the practice. Those that exemplify ecosystem characteristics reflect sociological, economic, and ecological objectives in an integrated process that manages across jurisdictional boundaries. Most importantly, those that appear to be the most successful require stakeholder involvement that is fully collaborative and voluntary. Again, those collaborating are looking at units of management that reflect ecosystem patterns, like major watersheds, and consider all natural and cultural elements in an interdisciplinary context. In many of the best examples, government representatives are playing more of a participative or support role to a locally driven initiative.

Our inquiry has focused largely on the process of decision making. The process is built on trust, mutual respect, and a

genuine partnership of stakeholders. The structure is centered around strategic planning and negotiation with values explicitly stated, goals defined in outcomes, and landscape level involvement in decisions that directly affect those at the table.

Observing this grassroots phenomenon in practice has led me to believe that there

is something of value occurring spontaneously across the country that may well lead to a dramatic change in the institutions in which we all work. The examples we have observed are extremely diverse in adapting to the environments and cultures of the landscapes within which they are located, but they have generic characteristics, such as being adaptive, flexible, collaborative, interdisciplinary, or involving partnerships. They appear to provide an excellent model for interorganizational efforts that cross old agency boundaries and involve communities in a partnership. I like what I am seeing and look forward to being able to

The Keystone Center, located in Keystone, Colorado, is a private, nonprofit organization. Under the auspices of its Science and Public Policy Program founded in 1976, the center facilitates the resolution of national public policy conflicts through the use of a consensus dialogue approach.

Keystone's mission is to design and facilitate innovative processes to address complex and controversial issues and assist participants in the development of productive and practical solutions. At stake in most of the issues Keystone facilitates is quality of life, the economy, and utilization and conservation of natural resources.

provide my colleagues with a copy of the final product.



Karen Wade is Superintendent of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee and North Carolina. Her phone number is (615) 436-1200.