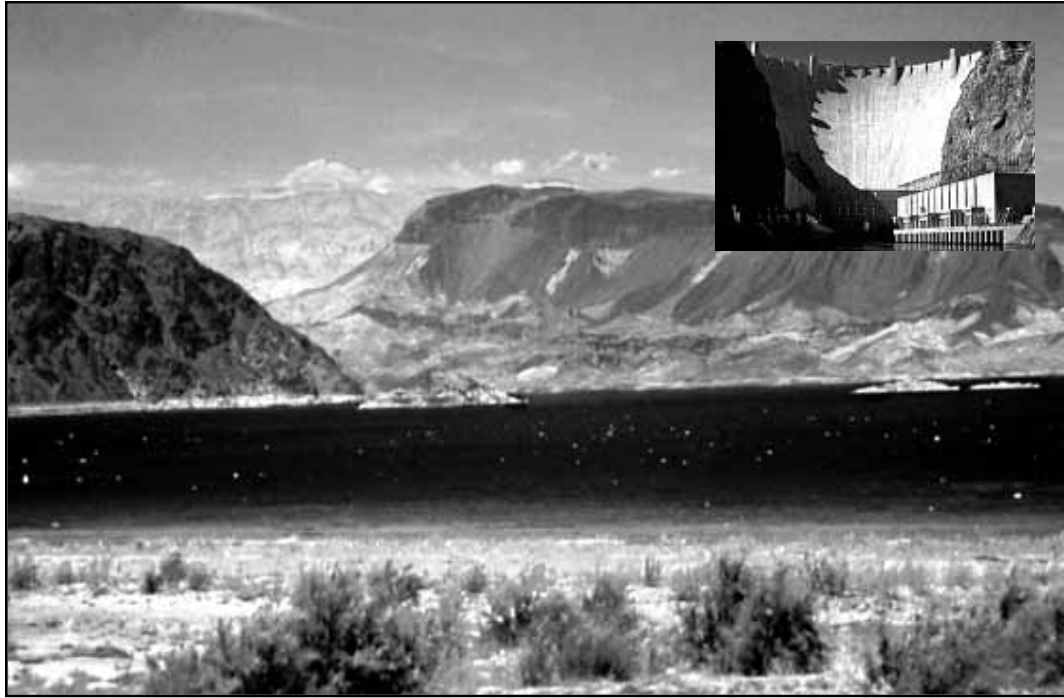




Engineering marvel of the 1930s, Hoover Dam and its Lake Mead National Recreation Area home were the site of a November meeting to assess the effects of the NPS reengineering and restructuring phenomenon of the 1990s on natural resource management and science.

IS THE NATURAL RESOURCE DISCIPLINE FLOURISHING?

A summary of the Lake Mead meeting
on natural resource management in the restructured NPS

BY THE EDITOR

GOVERNMENT REINVENTION, one theme of our work over the last year and a half, has brought about fundamental and long-lasting change to everyone associated with natural resource management and science in the National Park Service. Some changes are positive for resource management while others are still evolving. However, where initial success in the transition has been high, more recent indications are that it has slowed or, in some cases, stalled altogether. Some problems associated with the complex task of bringing about fundamental cultural change are just beginning to surface and be studied and understood. Mid-course correction is now needed to address staffing, communication, and funding problems in order to enable natural resource managers to work effectively and flourish under the new structure.

The current state of resource management was the subject of a November meeting of a broad range of resource management professionals who gathered at Lake Mead National Recreation Area (see photo), Nevada. Associate Director for Natural Resource Stewardship and Science Mike Soukup set the tone for the 2½-day meeting by acknowledging that the reorganization has had a profound effect on everyone in the National Park Service. The associate director charged the nearly 45 resource management professionals from parks, system support offices (SSOs), the National Natural Resource Program Center (NNRPC), and field directorates with the task of assessing the effects of restructuring on resource management and moving beyond problems by focusing on the areas that are most important to further natural resource management in the parks.

CHANGES IN COMMUNICATION

Over the next 2½ days, the group heard 25 sessions that covered the spectrum of natural resource activities taking place in parks, SSOs, at the field area level, in the NNRPC, and within the Washington Office. From the start, meeting participants indicated that communication had increased out of necessity, but had become more complex under the new organization. They also noted that cooperation between parks and SSOs is up. Creativity is high and field areas, most SSOs, and most clusters (groups of biologically, geographically, or culturally associated parks) are devising individual approaches to managing day-to-day concerns. Thus, functions that were once familiar across regions may not exist any longer or may have changed substantially making communication both vital and a basic challenge for nearly everyone.

Adding to communication complexities are the differences by which SSOs have filled out their new structures. Two field areas (the Pacific/West and Intermountain) have largely completed their organizations, filled positions, and generally understand how they will function. The Pacific West Field Area has nine positions in three SSOs related to natural resource management excluding GIS and compliance; the Columbia Cascades SSO has an additional 3.3 positions for GIS and compliance. The Intermountain Field Area reports 18 positions filled, including six devoted to GIS and one for compliance. At the other extreme are the Southeast and National Capital Field Areas, for they have little or no staff in their SSOs to provide park support. The other field areas are somewhere in between. For example, the Northeast Field Area has 15 positions allocated for three SSOs, including the compliance and GIS functions, but only eight are filled and two of the seven vacancies are unfunded. Likewise, only half of the Midwest Field Area's 13 required positions (including GIS, but excluding compliance) for two SSOs are funded and filled. An additional two positions are needed for compliance.

Many resource management job titles are new, longer than before, and reflect new roles and functions for many positions. For example, each field area now has an Associate Field Director for Natural Resource Stewardship and Science (or similar title) that was filled, in most cases, by a former regional chief scientist. The role has changed from one of coordinating the science and resource management activities for a region (with line authority, programs, and budgets) to one of filling a strictly advisory role with no funds, staff, or programs. While these positions may also include other areas of responsibility, such as planning, the incumbents raise important resource management concerns to the field directors and still serve a liaison function between the field, CPSUs (cooperative park studies units), and the National Biological Service. As an exception, two former chief scientists have retained the title of Chief Scientist and now serve the Allegheny/Chesapeake and New England SSOs in advisory and coordination roles.

At the system support office level, one former regional chief scientist and several

regional chiefs of resource management have become either Team Coordinators for Stewardship and Partnerships (supervisory positions with a broader role than the former regional chief of resource management) or Program Leaders for Natural Resources who report to the team coordinator. Program leaders work with small staffs of SSO resource managers, but are no longer supervisors.

ALASKA DIFFERENT

Whereas all field areas are trying different operational approaches under restructuring, the Alaska Field Area has changed very little. The legal requirements for subsistence fishing and hunting, etc., under ANILCA (the 1980 legislation creating most Alaskan parks in their present form), combined with severe park isolation and lack of park housing led to a practical and successful central office organizational approach. The Alaska SSO has requested that the National Leadership Council allow them to maintain higher central personnel levels than originally targeted for downsizing. If granted, the positions would have to come from unfilled positions elsewhere.

The Alaska Cluster of parks, like the National Capital Cluster, also has adopted no new structure. With just 14 superintendents, this group already functioned somewhat like a cluster and has not had to make fundamental changes.

CLUSTER CONSIDERATIONS

The focus on the cluster is perhaps the biggest change affecting parks in the reorganization. Where parks formerly constituted the basic unit of planning and work, clusters are now beginning to play this role. In the case of the Pacific/Great Basin Cluster, annual cluster work planning is becoming as important as park work planning has been. Larry Bancroft, Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park Chief of Resource Management explained, "[Restructuring] has removed the prioritization processes that [we] normally went through with strategic planning and leads [us] to try to take on everything at high quality. We can't. We must prioritize, then we could come out ahead... Now the clusters must approach work plans cluster by cluster. Then [we] must share the resources to get the work done." Carrying this new concept through

to a practical conclusion, Air Resources Division Chief John Christiano noted that "park hiring may need to be influenced by the greater needs of the cluster rather than the individual needs of the park. A cluster may need to do a staffing plan for the good of the cluster."

While locating the right person for a particular purpose has become more difficult as staff learn how the clusters and system support offices function, communication between superintendents has increased. Superintendents now have more decision making power and budgetary control than in the past and are competing less with one another for funds. Instead, they tend to be considering the broad range of issues for all parks in their respective clusters. They now have no regional office funds to compete for, but must decide how to divide monies amongst themselves.

To help provide leadership for the cluster, many clusters have adopted a "cluster executive council," a subgroup of cluster superintendents, to take action on cluster concerns and communicate with the field director on behalf of the cluster. Here, too, different approaches to the same circumstance have evolved. Some clusters have identified one superintendent as an "executive superintendent," while others use the council format, but call this group by another name. One field area cluster uses a "desk officer" to act as liaison with the field director, another uses an "advocate." The Alaska and National Capital Clusters have no such group at all. Whatever it is called, this function is important to natural resource management as it often serves to prioritize projects for the cluster, feeding projects into the list of priorities for the field area at large.

SUPERINTENDENTS KEY

Under the new order, superintendents have clearly become more important for the advancement of resource management. Less emphasis on resource management is coming from central offices and superintendents are the ones who must become advocates for resource management as a management tool. This puts added emphasis on the need for resource management experience or training for

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superintendents, especially first time superintendents and those with assignments in small parks.

Southeast Field Area Associate Field Director for Natural Resource Steward-

With scarce resources all around, Ocmulgee National Monument Superintendent John Bundy indicated that resource management projects must be promoted on the basis of how they add value, lead to lower cost or simplification, or could compete on the open market.

have done. Janet Wise, Natural Resource Program Leader for the Colorado Plateau SSO indicated that 60% of their SSO positions operate across cluster boundaries, increasing the expertise each SSO has to offer parks. Where SSO expertise is lacking, they have identified park expert leads

or cooperating students pursuing higher degrees to fill the niches. They also use one Denver Service Center natural resource planner living in a park for support. Their cre-

Under the new order, superintendents have become more important for the advancement of resource management

ship and Science Suzette Kimball has noticed both positive and negative effects of this role elevation. "Park superintendents," she commented, "have become involved in the [resource management] issues, have had to set priorities, and have become more technically proficient in the skills necessary to evaluate resource management problems [than in the past. However,] much is not getting done at all or as well as it once was being done." Nevertheless, resource managers in general have been able to increase contact with their superintendents since restructuring. With support no longer coming from the regional office level, superintendents must rely on help from park resource management staff more.

To help them deal with natural resource concerns, some clusters are using natural resource advisory groups (often chiefs of resource management), subordinate to the cluster leadership, to bring forth recommendations, identify priorities, carry out the staff work associated with natural resources, and give advice on natural resource issues. For example, the Columbia/Cascades Cluster has identified a natural and cultural resource advisory group and the Pacific and Great Basin Clusters share such an advisory group. The Pacific West Field Area also has an advisory committee for natural resources at the field area level. Areas of member expertise may include natural resource program management, the National Biological Service, or other technical areas. Some clusters, however, have no such organ and either rely on the cluster executive council to fill this niche or convene ad hoc groups at their discretion (with some eventually becoming permanent structures).

"It's crisis management in the field," he added, "and long-term resource management needs are hard to sell." He also said that the more ties a resource management proposal has to legal mandates, the more leverage it has. Public education is also necessary to gain support for long-term resource management funding.

SSOs AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Under the new structure, SSOs have replaced regional offices for field support, but they have no line authority or budgetary control as in the past. Through downsizing, they have generally lost personnel to the field in numbers that they no longer have the complete complement of expertise that they had under the regional office system. Instead, expertise must be shared among parks and their respective SSOs; SSOs now have to delegate some work to parks to serve the cluster effectively.

Some superintendents are surprised at the amount of work this is generating. Not surprisingly, larger parks with better developed resource management programs are beginning to feel the burden of these

active approach has given more resources to parks without having to fill the positions from within. In the spirit of reengineering, they served an important coordination role assembling a complete set of experts from a variety of sources.

Unfortunately, this is not yet an option for SSOs that are very poorly staffed. As already mentioned, the Atlantic Coast and Gulf Coast SSOs have no permanent staff person to call for support, and the Appalachian SSO has only one—the Natural Resource Program Leader. After directing their attention toward reducing central office staff, the Southeast Field Area was prepared to rehire for restructured positions when a hiring freeze went into effect. In order to accomplish some resource management work while their positions have remained empty, they have made good use of contractors and cooperative agreements. However, they expect to begin losing ground if they cannot fill approved vacant positions. Likewise, the National Capital SSO has no staff related to natural resource management. These numbers are unusually low for SSOs (most others have 3-6 filled positions, in-

SSOs have lost personnel in numbers that they must now partner with parks to serve clusters effectively

requests. Smaller parks are beginning to look to them for help, and unfortunately, the phones in *some* SSOs are no longer ringing. Although interpark work experiences offer terrific professionalization opportunities, superintendents are sure to have a tough time responding to all requests without staff and budget increases.

A potential solution is to share SSO expertise across cluster boundaries as the SSOs of the Intermountain Field Area

cluding clerical) and reflect the most current and potentially difficult problem for resource management in the National Park Service: lack of funds to fill approved positions.

FILLING PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

The money problem is not the result of restructuring per se; restructuring may have been predicated on a faulty assumption of increasing staff *and* funds at the

park level, while reducing the same in central offices. Although central office staff reductions are generally progressing at a pace to meet 1999 personnel targets, the funds to pay for the increased staff in parks this fiscal year are lacking. As Northeast Field Area Associate Director for Natural Resource Stewardship and Planning Bob McIntosh summarized, "The budget is the key for parks to be able to pick up the responsibilities being dropped by the central offices... We must get growth back into the parks or they will begin to lose ground."

Tighter funds also means that central offices may not have until 1999 to meet their reduced personnel targets. The implication for parks, if reductions in force (RIFs) are to be avoided, is that they may be asked to take experienced, yet professionally unqualified, staff into resource management positions. Furthermore, the Department of the Interior (DOI) has begun to require that displaced DOI employees be considered for vacancies rather than allowing parks to recruit. This situation could have long-term ramifications for the professionalization of natural resource management and makes each hire, however restricted, especially important.

NATIONAL PROGRAMS

Associate Director Soukup outlined the new national natural resource organization, indicating that restructuring has had a very positive effect on the former Washington Office programs. Now organized under a National Natural Resource Program Center, located primarily in Colorado, six programs formerly operating under three different associate directors have been consolidated and strengthened through their closer association with one another. The NNRPC is now comprised of the Air Resources Division (formerly Air Quality), Water Resources Division, Geologic Resources Division (formerly Mining and Minerals), Environmental Quality Division, Natural Systems Office, and the Natural Resource Management Information Division.

Both the Geologic Resources Division and the Environmental Quality Division are new to the Natural Resource Stewardship and Science Directorate, but al-

ready have well developed programs that serve parks very effectively. The Geologic Resources Division has recently hired a cave specialist and is trying to expand its mission beyond mining and minerals to include other geologic resources. The Environmental Quality Division improves the national natural resource connection with park operations. This group brings scientific data to the compliance process and facilitates the use of compliance planning tools (e.g., NEPA) in parks. They also

conduct damage assessment procedures following environmental disasters (like the Exxon Valdez).

The new divisions (Natural Resource Information Division and Natural Systems Management Office) are comprised of some staff that formerly worked for the Wildlife and Vegetation Division (now dissolved). The former will assist parks in making better use of existing databases and will develop systems for facilitating a free exchange of natural resource information over the next several years. The Inventory and Monitoring Program, resource management database, national GIS coordination, and publications functions (including *Park Science*) now reside here. The Natural Systems Office will devote its time to helping parks deal with boundary influences, and will support parks negotiating land use easements with park neighbors. They may also help national park areas begin to approach strategic planning on a landscape scale. Some familiar programs once in the Wildlife and Vegetation Division are now here, such as National Natural Landmarks, Man and the Biosphere, Threatened and Endangered Species, and Exotic Species Management. A new direction for this group is furthering partnerships through grant writing and developing cooperative agreements. These efforts have already paid off with a \$1.2 million grant from Canon that was dedicated to park natural resource management projects.

Soukup explained that his emphasis in Washington will be on advocacy for the national natural resource program, and he

discussed several initiatives afoot to improve our capabilities. He has brought Dr. Gary Machlis of the University of Idaho on board at the national level for 2½ years to establish a basic social science program in the National Park Service. Most likely, this will be a CPSU (cooperative park studies unit) based program that will need to raise much of its own funding, but it will provide an important service for parks. Soukup has also applied for a Pugh Foundation grant to fund a visiting Chief Natural Scientist position. If filled, this

person will help focus the National Park Service on the need for science in park management. Soukup will continue to look for other funding sources to accomplish more research and resource management work in parks.

With the reorganization of the former Washington Office functions, parks now have greater technical expertise available in one place. The NNRPC will be publicizing the scope of services available to parks before contacting parks to offer technical assistance. Furthermore, they plan to unify all calls for assistance, incorporating those for both NRPP research (NBS provided) and resource management projects, to simplify the process.

RESEARCH

Cooperative Park Studies Units remain central to accomplishing research in national parks, and Mike Soukup encouraged natural resource professionals to strengthen ties with these valuable partners. The resources that CPSUs make available to parks are so useful that Soukup suggested that we broaden the cooperative agreements and go beyond research to include other programs, such as interpretation, cultural resources, and training. The status of some CPSUs was not clear since establishment of the National Biological Service and other changes in agreements, and the group agreed to update a list of CPSUs for the entire national park system.

Restructuring may have been predicated on a faulty premise that central office staff and funding reductions would be offset by growth in parks

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Participants also discussed the services provided by the National Biological Service, another primary NPS research source. A little over 2 years ago, we transferred \$30 million and 173 positions to the fledgling research agency. This change has required greater effort in parks to get assistance, and the problem appears to have become worse recently with the specter of NBS dissolution and eventual transfer to the U.S. Geological Survey. Now it is harder to get the same level of service as we got initially, and potential cuts to previous NPS projects worry many. Several meeting participants voiced their concerns about the fate of NRPP research projects given to the National Biological Service to carry out, when they may not have the expertise to do so. Others voiced frustration with having produced project priority lists without having seen results. The group resolved to support the NBS during this time of transition, but to get them to share their fiscal year 1996 work plan with us to help us track their level of

for resource management. They included: keeping the Natural Resource Stewardship Today for Parks Tomorrow initiative going in the hopes of eventually increasing resource management positions in parks; participating fully in the new NPS training strategy to make sure natural resource needs are fully met (including supporting a resource management fundamentals course this year); continuing to encourage superintendents to build resource management expertise in the parks and to include resource managers in the decision making process; completing the fiscal year 1996 goals of the Vail Agenda natural resource careers committee; promoting GIS as a general park management tool; and improving the service of the National Biological Service through participation in their strategic planning meetings.

SUMMARY

Restructuring has created a very different National Park Service in relation to natural resource management and science. Science must be specific and rel-

parks from attracting the professionals that are needed, and SSOs are in jeopardy of failing in regard to resource management technical support. Garnering support for long-term resource management projects is also especially difficult now with fiscal resources so scarce. Solutions to these problems appear to be limited to finding other funds (through government budget initiatives, soft monies, partnerships) to help us make progress. A separate initiative to create new research grade technical support scientist positions in parks (conducting applied science) is also needed, and this potential solution may be explored this year.

The empowerment of superintendents in the restructured National Park Service may have the greatest effect on resource management in the long run. Where Assistant Secretary Frampton initially vowed that restructuring would create an environment where resource management could "flourish," we now have an organization that will allow this to happen, but only if additional funds are found and superintendents promote and use the science and resource management tool. Consequently, the consensus of the

Through a grant, Soukup hopes to fill a visiting Chief Natural Scientist position to strengthen NPS focus on science in park management

support. Meanwhile, the associate director will be working on long-term solutions to concerns about the erosion of funding and other difficulties in working with these partners.

Clearly, science and resource management are partners, and where one experiences setbacks, the other feels the impacts. The link between research and resource management needs to be strengthened for resource management to be its best in parks.

AD HOC REPORT

The 1995 Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Natural Resource Management in the National Park Service has always been our benchmark against which to measure the effects of restructuring on the natural resource management discipline. At the close of the meeting, participants agreed that many items identified in the document still needed to be implemented to complete restructuring and realize further benefits

evant to park management problems and must have a broader role in support of law enforcement and interpretation in addition to resource management. Resource managers now have greater access to superintendents these days, giving them improved opportunities to contribute their concerns and data to the decision making process. Creativity in problem solving is high, and more coordination and cooperation is taking place between parks and central offices. Professional development opportunities for resource managers seem nearly limitless. Yet, the times have also created serious problems that appear to be setbacks for resource management.

Professionalization and technical support are areas where we appear to be having the greatest trouble. Budgets and position target limits have reduced the technical expertise in the system support offices and have not allowed parks to make up the difference as originally expected. Hiring restrictions may prevent

group is that superintendents need to be oriented to the resource management profession. We also need to encourage resource managers to develop the skills necessary for becoming effective superintendents.

With all that has changed, we may take pleasure in knowing that some of the things that we have always done well, we can and should continue to do as before. The RMAP database giving us objectivity in making our case for growth in the resource management profession, the resource management database giving superintendents and the NNRPC a tool for providing assistance, the NRPP funding for resource management projects, and our ability to prioritize park needs all put us in a position to get attention and support when times begin to favor resource management again.

