

A Different Spin on SSO Support

Three years ago, Chief Scientist John Karish of the Allegheny-Chesapeake System Support Office placed a 4-year term Natural Resource Specialist (wildlife biologist) at the cooperative park studies unit at

Penn State. The experiment, unique in the National Park Service, has proven successful in integrating many of the vast resources of Penn State into cluster park resource management projects. The natural resource manager, Michele Batcheller, sees many pluses, along with some minuses, in this alternative arrangement for SSO resource management operations.

From her office in University Park, Pennsylvania, Batcheller first worked on writing a deer management plan-environmental impact statement (EIS) for Gettysburg National Military Park and Eisenhower National Historic Site. Penn State had played an integral role in the research associated with the EIS and had completed a case study that focused on the manner in which participation was obtained during the scoping process. The CPSU had also documented deer movements, habitat use, and park impacts related to the issue. Batcheller had easy access to the CPSU researchers, who helped provide background for the EIS. Their expertise also proved important in clarifying many of the implications of certain data when she wrote the document. Another bonus was being able to confer regularly with Karish, who is also duty stationed there, about the eastern deer issue and other topics. (Karish has effectively administered the regional science and resource management programs for 16 years from the CPSU.) By working from Penn State, she was able to focus on writing without interruptions related to routine park or regional office operations. Although it required much coordination, the EIS

was signed by the regional director within 2 years, considered prompt for this kind of task.

Batcheller notes that her isolation from the parks is at times both an asset and a disadvantage. The separate duty station has helped her increase her impartiality in several projects. Even though she interviewed park staff about the deer management issue, Batcheller was able to be more objective when she wrote the EIS. This is because she was supervised by the regional office (now the system support office) rather than the park. However, isolation also challenges her to keep up with common, day-to-day, park operational problems and resource management activities. She comments that this reflects more strongly on her limited experience in the National Park Service, as opposed to the duty station itself. This is Batcheller's first NPS post and she sees the need for a comprehensive orientation to natural resource management in the National Park Service, such as the "Fundamentals" course offered last summer at the Albright Training Center. She regrets that she was unable to attend and has to rely on meetings and networking to provide her this orientation.

Since completing the EIS, Batcheller has broadened her duties. She now provides technical information and advice to cluster parks on wildlife management issues and threatened and endangered species. Surrounded by experts in sociology, forestry, fisheries, and wildlife management, she finds herself acting as a liaison in applying these resources to the best advantage of parks.