

USGS Plans for Future

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) recently published a 68-page strategic plan for the agency that will guide it until 2005. The report examines the current socio-political environment and charts the general course for the agency over that time span. The document, which can be viewed in its entirety on the World Wide Web at <http://online.wr.usgs.gov/stratplan/splan/main.html>, addresses demographic changes, public investment in science, society's concept of "public good," economic versus environmental interests, and the scarcity and management of natural resources. The document also stresses the need for continuing partnerships and developing long-term national databases.

The plan clearly reflects a developing change in program emphases. Over the next 10 years, the agency will emphasize: long-term interdisciplinary studies, mitigation studies, quality and accessibility of resources, international mineral-energy studies, nontraditional disciplines, regional and national studies, geospatial data integration, applied research and development, technology transfer, engaging in controversial issues, issue-driven studies, studies involving population centers, multiple-risk assessments, digi-

tal products, and real-time event responses.

Issued in May 1996, just half a year after Congress directed the National Biological Service to consolidate with the U.S. Geological Survey and half a year before this actually happened, the report does not go into details about the merger. Instead, the 19-page *NBS Strategic Science Plan*, published last October, guides the initial scientific efforts of the new Biological Resources Division (BRD) within the parent 118 year-old science agency.

Last October 1, the consolidation of the two agencies took place and BRD became the fourth division of the USGS, alongside water resources (the largest), geologic resources, and national mapping. Denny Fenn, former acting NPS Associate Director for Natural Resources and recently the NBS Western Regional Director, was appointed the first Chief Biologist of the new division.

Addressing a plenary audience at the George Wright Society conference last March, Fenn pointed out some benefits to the National Park Service of his division being situated with USGS. Many of the former cooperative park studies units, which are base funded, will be reestablished as park field stations, making them more accessible to parks. Furthermore, the BRD supports the establishment of cooperative ecosystem studies units and will share its key skills to make the proposal work.

Now, we must not turn our backs on the new division. We have the opportunity to forge partnerships with them, which will help form an agency culture that is responsive to our needs. Let us start by learning who to call and asking for assistance.