

Guest Editorial

Good hard scientific data, as a phrase, is hardly synonymous with "sugar coating," yet when it comes to tough, unpopular management decisions, such data often can make a bitter pill go down more easily.

I've had my share of such situations in the course of my eight years as Director of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and my six years as a member and sometimes-chairman of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, and I know first-hand how important it is to have the facts AND to be able to put your hands on them when you need them.

So the first thing I want to tell scientists and resource managers in the field is that I am committed in every way to GIS – Geographic Information Systems – as one of the most important tools of the future. It gives us a tool for developing common bonds between our parks and the regional geographic systems of which they are a part. Compatibility, so that data can be shared throughout the System, and retrievability, so that the immediacy of so many of our problems can be met with immediate, informed response: these are my primary concerns as I tackle the responsibility of directing the National Park Service.

Indiana was my training ground and it was a microcosm for the tasks now at hand. There I managed parks, forests, reservoirs, fish and wildlife areas, and was responsible as well for state museums and memorials, historical resources, and coal mine reclamation. It was in this position that I learned other valuable lessons. I found that by minimizing confrontation and looking instead for common goals, it was possible to make common cause of unlikely partners. The results can be surprisingly satisfactory for conservers *and* developers, for the environment *and* the human society it supports.

I take very seriously the fact that our great National Park System is an environmental barometer for the world – and the opportunity this gives us to contribute baseline information about worldwide conditions and change. We have taken global climate change as a



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Departmental responsibility – to study it, to understand it, and to cooperate in efforts to meet those changes with all the wisdom and stewardship we can muster.

Our parks and biosphere reserves are prime sensory stations for feeling and dealing with global environmental conditions. They also afford us unparalleled "classroom" opportunities for educating the public, for bonding us to our historic and cultural past, for appreciating our natural grandeur, and for inspiring us to work toward a future worthy of our roots.

An informed public is our best hope for meeting the challenges posed by change; our park-based science and resource management is the wellspring of this vital information.

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