

To the Editor:

Since you requested that I write an article about setting up the new Coastal Research Center at the Graduate School of Oceanography, University of Rhode Island, there has been a significant change in direction – I am now in Everglades NP as the Director, South Florida Research Center instead. It was a difficult choice, at first.

At the new North Atlantic/Mid-Atlantic joint CPSU, which will have four or five NPS scientists in disciplines covering the spectrum of coastal issues, I would have been able to pursue my own research area again, sharpen my scientific skills (after over 13 years in a regional office), and help prepare coastal parks for the coming conflicts over limited resources. What could be better? Then came the Everglades offer. The South Florida Research Center was created directly by Congress (in 1976) to address the formidable array of issues and threats facing a large, unique, and manipulated system. Today the stakes remain very high, and the role of science is immediately crucial. Past water management and future development-related impacts seem nearly overwhelming.

Thus, if there is one place that best demonstrates that the mission (and the future) of the Service is a highly technical one, it is here. In my discussions with park leadership there was no question that this is well-understood and that the science program would be fully supported and utilized.

After weighing all the variables associated with any new assignment, it seems clear that if one is in the Service to understand natural systems, solve their management problems, and contribute to their preservation, then – right now – the Everglades is the place to be.

Mike Soukup
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