

Guest Editorial

By Eugene Hester, Associate Director, Natural Resources

These are exciting times in Natural Resources in NPS. We have nearly completed the groundwork for future improvements, including completion of the Natural Resources Assessment and Action program, development of new guidelines for planning and implementing resource management activities, and training nearly 100 graduates of the Natural Resource Management Trainee program.

Among several exciting initiatives getting underway is our advocacy of parks as appropriate places for global change studies and our expectation that our role in this program will begin in FY 91. (See page 10.)

Understanding our natural resources and what is happening to them over time (Inventory and Monitoring) is one of our most basic needs. Last year I convened a task force to expedite implementing I&M strategies outlined by the "Evison Committee." Based on the task force results, I allocated FY 90 funds to start implementing the program and developed proposals for FY 92 and a 10-year plan. We have great potential to improve our research and resource management programs, but need a clearer understanding of our needs and a plan to meet those needs. I am recruiting a deputy associate director to give the kind of day-to-day oversight I believe these initiatives need. Also, I have recommended a number of other FY 92 resource management funding proposals.

Congress asked us to do a study of our research program and make recommendations for its future. The National Academy of Sciences has that study underway with an excellent panel that includes members with experience in NPS and government research administration. It should be able to provide genuinely helpful recommendations. Finally, we have a director who is a real advocate for developing and using scientific data bases.

Other activities that attest to our bright future are the recent Regional Chief Scientists' meeting and a meeting of Natural Resource Specialists at a training workshop in Denver in May. While the RCSs have been meeting regularly, this was the first meeting of NRM personnel. It was organized by regional personnel (special kudos to Kathy Joje), based on their perceptions of the need to have a stronger natural resource management focus throughout the organization. Among the themes that emerged was that research often developed excellent management recommendations, but there often is no funding or personnel to implement them.

Funding is not the only deficit; we still have need for more well-trained specialists, as well as generalist rangers with good education in natural resources. Another theme was the need for more strategic planning and objective setting. Finally, improved communication and cooperation emerged as a prescription for improved natural resource management.

I expect to move forward, making more effective use of our existing resources and proving, with the expected FY 91 increases, that we can make wise use of additional resources. Less case-by-case crisis management and a more programmatic approach is needed, as well as consideration of the larger ecosystems and biogeographical areas in which our resources are embedded.

To effect these improvements, we must provide increasingly effective national and regional leadership and strategic planning, and we must move forward with park-based information and with adequate resources directed at the park level.