

editorial

By this time, almost everyone in “the field” has heard the news that the 75th Anniversary Conference at Vail, Colorado, was not your usual run-of-the-mill self-improvement exercise. Despite the earnest iteration of lofty goals and promised results, those of us who have been around for longer than “awhile” were not on tiptoes with expectancy. In fact, the opening day saw a lot of conversation knots where I’ve-been-here-so-many-times-before was the central theme.

So imagine our surprise – then delight – then, well, almost elation, when the sessions turned into real down-and-dirty discussions about a whole host of things that have been bugging us for lo-these-many – when the leaders of the working groups and the plenary session speakers began to talk in tones seldom heard at such conferences. Instead of the usual self congratulatory droning, we heard the NPS’s real needs for change described, deplored, and then turned over to the working groups for suggested reform ACTION. And the groups didn’t fudge. They tackled the issues with the energy and thought they so desperately need, and the process is continuing at near boiling point.

There isn’t room (nor is it this publication’s appropriate task) to enumerate the recommendations and the conference-generated revisions that took place under the four headings: Organizational Renewal, Resource Stewardship, Park Use and Enjoyment, and Environmental Leadership. It **is** within our purview to suggest that everyone in the Service should be participating strenuously in the process now underway, the outcome of which will be the Report to the Director.

And here’s another encouraging straw in the wind: The Director was **there** throughout the entire conference. So were most of the plenary speakers and all the workshop leaders. And almost every one of the 600 participants stayed through the entire three days and took heated part in all the sessions and work groups. They began with our NPS idea and mission and then proceeded to outline just how far short of these ideals our past budgets and leadership have allowed us to fall. Twice during his address to the conference, Secretary Luhan told the delegates that park resources preservation must take precedence over visitor uses.

There was more than aplenty that will affect the field, its research activities and its management mission. Every park unit and office in the Service has received copies of the post-Symposium issues and preliminary recommendations. The period for public comment closed on Dec. 13. The Working Groups’ final reports to the Steering committee are scheduled for completion in early January, after which the Steering Committee will prepare the final report to the Director.

I hope this is not a premature paeon of praise. It **is** a heartfelt thank you to the Steering Committee that put the Service on the line, to the outsiders – experts, critics, friends, and advisors – who told us how we looked to them and made strong suggestions as to what we should do about it, and to the Park Service that called this group into being and then bravely stood up and took the flak it had invited.

Hurray for us all!