

External Development Affecting the National Parks: Preserving "The Best Idea We Ever Had"

By Thomas W. Lucke

Wallace Stegner once described America's national parks as "the best idea we ever had." How to preserve and protect the unique qualities and superlative resource of these parks from adverse impacts caused by development beyond their boundaries was the topic of a Conference conducted from Sept. 14 to 16, 1986 at Aspen Lodge, Colo., which, with its sweeping view of Long's Peak and Rocky Mountain NP, was more than an appropriate setting. Organized by the National Resources Law Center of the University of Colorado School of Law, the Conference was attended by 85 participants, 18 of whom were NPS employees.

During the two days following a keynote address entitled "The Future of the National Parks: Recreating the Alliance Between Commerce and Conservation" by Professor Robin Winks of Yale University, a number of scholars involved with NPS issues gave presentations. They included Alfred Runte, author of *National Parks: the American Experience* and Professor of History at the University of Washington; author and naturalist Robert Cahn of Leesburg, Virginia; T. Destry Jarvis of the National Parks and Conservation Association; Alston Chase, author of *Playing God in Yellowstone*; Professor George Cameron Coggins of the University of Kansas School of Law; and Michael Mantell of the Conservation Foundation.

Congressional activities regarding park protection were detailed by Judy Erickson, Legislative Assistant to Sen. David Durenberger (Minn.); the Department of Interior's position on the question of external threats and adverse peripheral development was given by Steve Gleason, Deputy to the Under Secretary, and Allan Fitzsimmons, Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks. NPS speakers included Molly Ross of the Air Quality Division, Supt. James Thompson of Rocky Mountain NP, and John Varley, Chief of Research at Yellowstone NP.

Two case studies concerning development activities outside park boundaries that hold potential for significantly affecting water and wildlife resources and values within park boundaries were presented and discussed. They were "Challenges of the Greater Yellowstone" by Bill Bryan, Board Member of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, and "Restoring the Biological Integrity of Everglades National Park" by Estus Whitfield, Senior Analyst with the Office of the Governor of Florida.

The Conference purpose was to explore park values requiring protection, to examine possible threats to those values posed by external activities, to identify and weigh the legal and management issues involved, and to suggest possible approaches for improving park protection. Judging from the response of many of the participants, that purpose was achieved.

As to weaknesses in the Conference, several participants felt it would have been helpful if private developers or representatives of extraction and developmental interests had been present to put forth their concerns and perspectives on the concept of park protection.

The handbook developed for the course is available for \$30.00, and audio tapes of all the sessions are available for \$75.00. They can be obtained by writing to Katherine Taylor, Natural Resources Law Center, University of Colorado School of Law, Campus Box 401, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0401.