

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

Among the many gems in your Winter issue was the final exchange with Supt. Bill Briggie on the role of Park Rangers in resource management and appreciation. Individual specialization and the centralization of talent by Service policy have combined to relocate resource-management skills from uniformed people in the parks to staff people in centers and central offices.

By this statement I do not intend any denigration of the expertise and the necessary role of staff specialists and scientists — in both the natural and cultural resource fields. Rather, I call for a balance. We need discipline-competent people in the resource, people who are part of the park management team in its day-to-day operation. Lacking this balance, people detached from and often totally inexperienced in area operations end up effectively calling the resource-management shots. Often, because of the intimidation fostered by the priesthood of expertise, resident park people — reduced to custodial functions — abdicate their resource-management responsibilities.

I believe that Briggie's comment has germinal import. It ramifies through organizational structures and long-established (if not venerated) personnel policies of the Service. We have left critical posts unmanned in the parks, relying instead on occasional visitations by teams of experts. It does not work. It lacks the synthesis of general and area-specific knowledges.

This subject deserves some concentrated thought. There needs to be a forum established for such thought. Particularly is this true in a time of austerity and institutional stress. As central mechanisms falter, the parks are forced to become more autonomous.

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