

Given the interconnectedness of every living thing that inhabits the envelope of this cell-like planet we call Earth, the *BioScience* article "Preparing for Climate Change" abstracted on page 12 of this issue could be describing one of the most serious challenges to park management that we have experienced or will experience in the foreseeable future.

As Stephen H. Schneider of the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo., notes: "the phenomenon is one of the best-established theories in atmospheric science."

The particular problem that climate-change poses for parks is two-fold. First, there is the realization that in the real world of push-coming-to-shove, the fragile values are the first to crumble. And as we have found so often in the past, park values usually run a poor second to profits and jobs.

The second consideration is not-so-simply this: Given the first consideration, what can the National Park Service do to protect its resources? The answer is not something that can be neatly spelled out in an editorial or even in a tome. It must be carefully worked at, step by step, as the problems and the opportunities emerge. The recent conference has alerted resource managers to the "oneness" of what might otherwise be seen as a group of disconnected problems.

For instance, the overall warming of earth's atmosphere is fingered as a possibly major contributory factor in the death of coral reefs (see page 12 this issue). With the emerging recognition that climate change may be the trigger in a whole panoply of problem areas, the conferees began to look for ways to divide the issue into "chewable pieces, and start working on those pieces right now."

On Feb. 10, 1988, Interior Deputy Under Secretary Becky Norton Dunlap appointed a 12-person Departmental Working Group on Climate Change (DWGCC), chaired by Martin Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Director, Office of Policy Analysis, to look into potential impacts of climate change on DOI bureaus and to come up with short and long term options as possible responses and mitigation measures.

If the trend is found to be as swift and serious as some believe, then park resources such as certain animal and plant communities may be stressed beyond their abilities to survive – especially since most are now hemmed in by developments that prevent what would have been their former evolutionary escape routes. Whole ecosystems may even disappear – like the delicate, richly productive wetlands that could be drowned by a rise in ocean levels.

In the face of such possibilities, the NPS science program must ask itself if the inventory and monitoring guidelines now under consideration will give the baseline information needed against which to measure future climate-induced changes. In other words, are we ready to do our part in assessing the natural responses that seem to be taking place? And as we find the answers, can we set up an intra-System strategy for dealing with these changes?

It seems unlikely at this point that the greenhouse warming effect will turn out to be "an infrared herring" as Schneider put it. But as he concluded, we cannot wait too long to act: We "need to gaze into a very dirty crystal ball" and then decide "precisely how long to clean the glass before acting on what we think we see inside."