

What is a park?

The answer is a many-leveled thing. But as every scientist and resource manager knows, one definition would have to be that a park is a complex amalgam of problems, opportunities, failures and solutions. And definition for this level of "what a park is," involves much more than the area encompassed by the park's geographic boundaries. It must include (in addition to the resource base) the people who manage the park, the people whose activities impact the park, the people whose fortunes depend on the park, the people who enjoy the park, the people whose interests collide with management of the park - in short, "the people."

Just before press time for the preceding issue of Park Science, a report from Chuck Stone, Hawaii Volcanoes NP scientist, reached our desk. It dealt with the June 1984 symposium on Protection and Management of Terrestrial Hawaiian Ecosystems. While the report was specific to Hawaii, it spoke in a general way to resource managers everywhere, particularly as it seemed to address the most complex level at which a park can be defined . . . the one involving people.

The account described a symposium that focused on both problem areas and achievements, and then moved on to consider current and future roles of agencies, conservation groups, legislation, and the public, in preserving and managing Hawaiian ecosystems (see report on page 13.)

The representation at this refreshingly candid gathering was from the State senate, from conservation organizations, from a native Hawaiian group, from the ranching community, from State and Federal agencies, and others. A remarkable amount of optimism was expressed. Among the successes cited were cooperative research in biocontrol for alien plants, the cooperative mongoose control project, the Hawaiian goose captive propagation and release project, the endangered species recovery team work, and numerous activities of The Nature Conservancy. The key word here was "cooperative" and the agencies involved included Hawaii Division of Forestry and Wildlife, U.S. Forest Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, NPS, the University of Hawaii, the Hawaii Department of Agriculture, and others.

In the "problems and opportunities" department, here is a quote from Stone's report:

"The usually expressed needs for increased communication and education at nearly all levels were articulated, and it is vital that these be better addressed. Additional problem areas identified (and perhaps aggravated by insularity and shortage of trained researchers, managers, and educators, in relation to the magnitude of the problems) are: Lack of adequate and comprehensive land use planning; a shortage of conservation advocates who are not scientists; conflicts between the advocacy and the scientific roles and loss of credibility for both so far as landowners and others are concerned; conservation 'gadflies' who polarize issues too frequently and too soon; bureaucratic inertia and lack of effort; unprofessional behavior of resource professionals as manifested in excessive pettiness; uncompleted, unpublished, and unrefereed reports and lack of follow through; lack of local training and education for resource specialists; and agency administrators/managers who choose not to protect, manage, and interpret the natural resources under their care, who are dominated by agency hierarchies and politics, and/or do not understand the needs for adequate and active stewardship in Hawaii and do not place a high priority on meeting these needs."

As this report missed the last issue and as time passed, it seemed that the message grew as large as the entire National Park System and that Hawaii's invitation to such a wide and representative group of park-related people, for such open and frank discussions was worth presenting in the larger context in which it actually is taking place.

What happened in Hawaii is only the latest example of a wave that has been gathering for some time now, all over the System . . . a wave of looking and listening and reaching out, in cooperation with other people, for ways of better serving the resource and the public.

Whenever and wherever the National Park Service takes the lead or any part in such an undertaking, dividends accrue to both our professional status and the resources we husband.