

NATURAL RESOURCES STEWARDSHIP AND SCIENCE UPDATE REPORT
WEEKS OF APRIL 1, 8, 15, AND 22

April 22, 1996

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES Cluster T&E coordinators met in Washington the last week in March to discuss a strategic plan for T&E management in NPS. Linda Gregory, ACAD, has been assisting Peggy Olwell in Washington this week and last with follow-up on the meeting and with putting together a request for information on T&E expenditures, needed to assist the Fish and Wildlife Service in completing its mandated report to Congress. The request was issued on April 22 to Field Area Directors, with copies to SSOs and cluster leadership. Linda also helped Peggy compile information for a Congressional oversight hearing on the Endangered Species Act.

NBS The NBS recently issued a call for a review of agency research priorities. It is needed for workplanning for FY 1997 (at approximately current budget levels) and for budget development planning for FY 1998--the USGS, where NBS is headed come October 1, requires input by early June, so NBS is on a tight schedule. No specific projects are being requested or prioritized as a result of this call and any changes in priorities are likely to result in curtailing some existing projects, as no new funds are anticipated. The NBS is looking for any changes in the priorities for larger research questions such as amphibian decline, exotic plant control, effects of regional air pollutants on park resources, fish management impacts to natural aquatic systems in national parks, population trends and habitats of neotropical migratory birds in national parks, and effects of native animal overpopulation in parks-- examples of previous high priority "national" topics (eastern and western priorities have also been developed in the past; due to restructuring to fit USGS's administrative structure, there will be three sets of regional priorities in the future). The NBS will continue to use the National Park Service's processes to rank individual park projects for NBS NRPP funding--those will not be affected by this call. Assistant Field Area Directors for natural resources or their designees are coordinating responses to the NBS call.

WEEDS The interagency weed group met and extensively revised its weed strategy. It will be accessible in draft on the Fish and Wildlife Service's Website (Refuge home page). It will undergo formal review after an agreement in concept among the agencies involved, targeted for next week. The National Park Service's weed strategy is expected to be ready for review shortly.

INTERAGENCY SOCIAL SCIENCE MEETING: Gary Machlis hosted a meeting on April 22 of social scientists from land management/environmental regulation agencies to discuss ways of cooperating in their programs. He is also attending making a presentation the week of April 29 to a roundtable of African- American social scientists in Cincinnati.

NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION HONORS PARTNERSHIP TO CLOSE OPENINGS AND PRESERVE BAT HABITAT AT MARISCAL MINE, BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK : Each year since 1992, the National Park Foundation has given five awards for partnerships which led to completion of innovative projects in the National Park System. This year the award in the category for Protection and Visitor Services was given to Big Bend National Park (Mike Fleming), the Southwest System Support Office (Linda Dansby),

Geologic Resources Division (John Burghardt), and the Railroad Commission of Texas for their roles in closing hazardous openings at the abandoned Mariscal Mercury Mine at Big Bend. The award was given "for correcting health and safety hazards posed by abandoned mine openings as well as for preserving bat habitat and historic resources."

The Mariscal complex, a National Register District, is one of the most significant historic mining properties in the National Park System, dating back to the turn of the century with three eras of operation clearly delineated in its well-preserved ore-processing facilities and outbuildings. The main mine complex consists of a half mile of underground workings spanning 7 levels to a depth of 425 feet below the ground's surface. Most of Mariscal's seventeen mine openings had been closed by the park in the 1970s and 1980s using chain link fence in a manner that largely excluded an extensive bat population from roosting in the mine. The innovative new closures allow free passage of bats, are much more effective at excluding humans, and are more in keeping with the historic fabric of the site. As a result of this project, bat habitat has been restored to its previous potential, wildlife and cultural resources are better protected from human disturbance, and public safety is more certain.

The project was funded and contracted by the Railroad Commission of Texas Abandoned Mines Program through a Cooperative Agreement arranged by the Geologic Resources Division staff and Dansby. This is one of eight cooperative agreements the NPS has with states for the reclamation of abandoned mines. Funding was obtained by the Railroad Commission from Title IV provisions under the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA), which is administered through the Office of Surface Mine Reclamation and Enforcement. Dansby was the principle coordinator for the Mariscal project, involving the Railroad Commission of Texas, Bat Conservation International, two private consultants, the State Historic Preservation Officer, and the NPS. She wrote the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project and circulated it for public comment. Fleming completed the EA process by writing a Finding of No Significant Impact / Decision Record, and coordinated the contractor's operations on the ground. Burghardt worked with RCT staff and the private consultants to design state-of-the-art closures, and worked with RCT and the contractor on-site to ensure compliance with the design. The project was completed in a timely fashion and within budget, largely due to excellent coordination by RCT staff, assisted by Dansby, Burghardt, and Fleming.

An awards banquet will be held for the honorees at the Rayburn House Office Building in Washington DC on April 24 at 6:00 pm.

GRAND CANYON VISIBILITY TRANSPORT COMMISSION HEARINGS: The Commission held public meetings throughout the Western states and in Washington, DC from April 9-17, 1996, in order to solicit public comment on the draft recommendation for improving visibility for the Class I parks and wilderness areas on the Colorado Plateau. (Air Resources Division)

COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN AND SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN REGIONAL AIR POLLUTION ASSESSMENTS: Air Resource Division staff have contributed significantly to two regional assessments organized by the USDA-Forest Service: the Southern Appalachian Assessment (SAA) and the Inner Columbia River Basin Assessment (ICRB). These documents are due out soon and will provide a synthesis of the current status of air quality, deposition, and their effects on resources in these two regions. These assessment documents discuss air-pollution effects on resources in Class I parks and wilderness areas, those known to have sensitive aquatic and terrestrial resources, along with important visibility resources. The air pollutants of concern include ozone,

acid deposition, and visibility-reducing particles. NPS Class I areas included in the assessments are: SAA: Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks; ICRB: Lava Beds National Monument, Craters of the Moon National Monument, Lassen-Volcanic National Park, Yellowstone National Park, Grand Teton National Park, Glacier National Park, Crater Lake National Park, Mount Rainier National Park, and North Cascades National Park. (Air Resources Division)

STATE OF TENNESSEE MOU RE AIR QUALITY: As reported previously, the State unilaterally rescinded a previously concluded MOU, before it was ever applied to a single case. The Governor formed a panel to review the MOU and make recommendations. The panel recommended to the Governor that the State: 1) enter into a new MOU with the DOI, using the rescinded MOU as the basis for a new agreement; 2) follow the spirit of the old MOU during the interim, (3) with DOI, work with other nearby States to develop similar agreements, and (4) convene a meeting of other State governors at Great Smoky Mountains NP to cooperatively address the park's air quality problems. The Governor issued a press release announcing that he strongly supports the recommendations and directed the Commissioner of the State's Department of Environment and Conservation to implement those recommendations as soon as possible. (Air Resources Division)

ANDALEX COAL MINE. Glen Canyon NRA recently submitted NPS comments on the preliminary draft EIS for the proposed Warm Springs coal mine (Andalex) to the BLM Kanab Resource Area manager. The proposed mine is adjacent to Glen Canyon, and the operator desires access through the park. NPS comments, prepared by GRD and park staff, provided extensive concerns about the impact analysis. The BLM took immediate steps to resolve identified issues and park staff are now pleased with the documents attention to NPS concerns. (Geologic Resources)

NPS STAFF MEET WITH HOMESTAKE MINING CO AT THE KATHERINE MINE SITE IN LAKE MEAD NRA - On April 8th-10th, GRD and Lake Mead staff met with representatives from the Homestake Mining Co. to discuss potential donation of services to the Park Service. Homestake has agreed to assist Lake Mead NRA with technical assessments and design work at the abandoned Katherine Mine and Mill Site. Already, Homestake has engaged three consultants to work on issues at the site.

In the last six months, Homestake Mining Co. approached Bob Higgins with the offer to perform pro bono work for the Park Service. They offered to help with technical assessments and mitigation designs at abandoned mine sites. The GRD recommended the Katherine Mine and Mill Site and Lake Mead NRA as a pilot site for this partnership. The Katherine Mine was chosen because: the park has \$160,000 allocated for mitigation and stabilization work at the site; the site is one of the highest priorities in the Park Service because of the seriousness of the hazards that exist; the site has been comprehensively geochemically characterized and does not seem to pose an environmental threat; and, heavy equipment can easily access and work at the site.