

Subject: April NRSS Monthly Report

Associate Director, Natural Resource Stewardship and Science Monthly Report

April 2003

Natural Resource Challenge

Establishment of Learning Centers Advisory Group: Members of the National Research Learning Center Advisory Group have been named. The group represents interests involved in learning centers and achieves a balance between research coordinator function and education function. Members include: Susan Sachs – Southeast Region, Christie Anastasia – Pacific West Region, Woody Smeck – Pacific West Region, Diane Pavcek- National Capital Region, Dr. Terry Terrell – Intermountain Region, Patti Reilly – Northeast Region, John Maounis – Northeast Region, Joan Gullifoye – Midwest Region, and Jim Pfeifferberger – Alaska Region. The Natural Resource Information Division will provide direction and staff support to the advisory group. Please note that the centers have been renamed as Research Learning Centers to more appropriately convey their role. Additional information on Research Learning Centers may be found at: <http://www.nature.nps.gov/learningcenters/index.shtm>.

New Developments

Collaborative State-Federal Decision for Restoration at Obed Wild and Scenic River: The Department of Interior and the State of Tennessee issued a Notice of Intent, dated April 21, 2003, to conduct restoration planning for an accidental oil spill in July 2002 that affected Obed Wild and Scenic River. Consistent with the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 federal and state natural resource agency trustees conducted a preliminary natural resource assessment to document potential resource injuries from the oil spill and associated fire at the Howard/White Unit #1 Well bordering the park. Based on the information developed through the Preassessment Phase, the park and State (co-Trustees) have determined that the response actions undertaken to date have not adequately addressed the resource injuries resulting from the oil spill and fire, and that further restoration action is needed.

Proposed Ground Water Withdrawals May Affect Chickasaw NRA: The United States participated in a pre-hearing conference held by the Oklahoma Water Resource Board (Board) on April 10, 2003. The Board will receive evidence at a hearing on May 21, 2003, related to the issuance of a permit to withdraw ground water near Chickasaw National Recreation Area for use by distant cities. The NPS is concerned that pumping large quantities of ground water in the

vicinity of the park may impact park water-related resources.

Significant Activities

Black Canyon of the Gunnison Water Rights Agreement: On April 2, 2003, the NPS, Bureau of Reclamation, and Fish and Wildlife Service entered into an agreement with the Colorado Water Conservation Board to resolve water rights issues affecting Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. Through the agreement protects the year-round minimum flow and periodic spring peak flows necessary to maintain park resources. To achieve this protection the United States agreed to reduce its federal reserved water right to the minimum flow and provide moderate spring peak flows through operation of the Bureau of Reclamation's Aspinall Unit dams.

IPM Partnership with Park Concessionaires: A new informative publication on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) was prepared by the Biological Resource Management Division in partnership with park concessionaires. The booklet "Understanding the NPS IPM Program" was distributed to regional offices in early April.

Proposed Coal Mining Upstream of Big South Fork – Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area has requested to become a cooperating agency in the Tennessee Valley Authority's (TVA) upcoming Kopper's Coal Reserve Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to protect the park's resources and values with assistance from the Geologic Resources Division. TVA plans to prepare a "programmatic-type" EIS on the entire 58,000 acre coal reserve that lies mostly in the New River watershed upstream of the park. TVA is the lead agency in preparing the EIS with the DOI Office of Surface Mining (permitting bureau for future mining) and the State of Tennessee (surface estate administrator) already designated as cooperators. Several small operations already mine portions of the estimated 71 million tons of the high-sulfur, TVA-owned coal reserve.

Professional Meetings

Joint Meeting of The George Wright Society Biennial Conference and CR2003 – A Conference for the National Park Service and its Partners: NPS managers and professionals from a wide range of disciplines attended the joint conference April 14-18, 2003 in San Diego, CA. The conference was jointly sponsored by The George Wright Society, NPS, USGS-Biological Resource Division, and the California Department of Parks and Recreation with additional support from Eastern National and The Environmental Careers Organization. Numerous Natural Resource Stewardship and Science personnel were involved in presentations at the joint conference. Additional information about the joint conference and links to abstracts of its sessions can be found at: <http://www.georgewright.org/2003overview.html>

Western Mercury Workshop: Air Resources Division (ARD) staff participated in a two day workshop Denver, CO, on mercury pollution. The workshop was sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and attended by state and federal agencies, universities, and research institutions.

Discussion topics included the sources, transport, and effects of mercury. Coal-burning power plants are the largest sources of mercury to the environment; in the West, past mining practices also released large amounts of mercury. Mercury is very toxic to humans and wildlife and accumulates in the food chain. Forty-eight states have fish-consumption advisories because of mercury contamination. ARD staff discussed current NPS efforts to increase the knowledge and understanding of mercury and its effects, including participation in the Mercury Deposition Network and the Western Airborne Contaminants Assessment Project.

Progress

Virginia Electric and Power Company Settlement Benefits Air Quality in Shenandoah: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a settlement with Virginia Electric and Power Company (VEPCO) that will benefit air quality in Shenandoah National Park and the entire Mid-Atlantic region. VEPCO was one of the power companies EPA had taken action against for modifying their power plants without first obtaining additional permits. As a result of the settlement, the NPS will receive \$1 million for mitigation projects to improve air quality in the park. The park is planning, among other ideas, to field test alternative-fueled and hybrid vehicles. In addition to funding NPS projects, the settlement will require VEPCO to reduce pollution from several of their facilities in Virginia and West Virginia, and create a system-wide cap on their air pollutant emissions. Cleaner air in the region and in Shenandoah should result by the time the work dictated by the decree is completed in 2015.

Fourth Annual Hydrogeology Consortium Workshop Held: The Fourth Annual Hydrogeology Consortium Workshop was held this month in Florida. The two-day workshop focused on the significance of caves and cave data in understanding hydrogeological processes in karst. The workshop provided a forum for developing closer ties between the caving and hydrogeological communities and contributing towards the achievement of common goals on natural resource conservation and protection among various stakeholders. An NPS Geologic Resources Division representative served as a panelist on the workshop's Cave Resource Management panel and supplied cave classification and significance criteria to the panel for their adaptation and use in Florida. A CD of the workshop's findings and recommendations will be distributed to workshop participants and made available to others through the Florida Geological Survey. Additional information about the workshop can be found at:

http://www.dep.state.fl.us/geology/newsevents/workshop_announcement.htm

Enhancing Professionalism within the IPM Community: An NPS Biological Resource Management Division representative attended the two-day 4th National IPM Symposium in Indianapolis, IN, and participated in a panel discussion on pesticide applicator certifications and approaches to a national applicator certification. The proposed national certification would enhance professionalism within the IPM community while supporting the education component of the National Management Plan for Invasive Species prepared by the Federal inter-departmental National Invasive Species Council. Additional information about the workshop can be found at: <http://nautilus.outreach.uiuc.edu/conted/conference.asp?ID=244>

Staff News

John Vimont joins the Air Resources Division as the new Chief, Research and Monitoring Branch. John has worked as a meteorologist for the Division since 1991. Prior to that time, he worked with EPA and the State of New Mexico. He has a B.S. and M.S. in Atmospheric Sciences from the University of Washington and Colorado State University, respectively. John brings a wealth of experience working with the scientific community and regulatory agencies. He will assume the new position on May 4, 2003.

Michael George joins the NPS as a new Air Quality Specialist through funding secured by the Natural Resource Challenge (specifically to address air quality issues in the United States/Mexico border regions) and will be duty stationed at the University of Texas, Austin. Mike brings considerable experience to the NPS coming from the Arizona Department of Air Quality, where he managed their air assessment section. Mike has research and coordination experience with international air pollution issues. He has worked with NPS Air Resources Division before, and should be a great asset to parks in Texas and along the border.

=====
(for) Abigail Miller
Deputy Associate Director, Natural Resource Stewardship & Science
National Park Service