

Subject: December Monthly Report

ADNRSS December Monthly Report

RECENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS/NEW DEVELOPMENTS

**NLC MEETING** The December NLC meeting focused on "revitalizing" natural resource programs and emphasis in the NPS. As a result of the meeting, Associate Director Soukup with Regional Director Barbee will convene a work group to develop a task directive that outlines a strategy to strengthen NPS natural resource management and protection.

The task directive will be completed for NLC review by January 15 and discussed in an NLC conference call in February. Implementation of the strategy will be discussed at the next NLC meeting. The strategy will include, and Bob Barbee is preparing, a Acall to action,@ declaring the NPS a science-based, resource management agency with a renewed emphasis on preservation as the organization's primary mission. It will identify a number of preservation initiatives, proposed by the regions, where National Park Service leadership can appropriately be brought to bear to boldly advance resource conservation in our country. These should focus on places whose uniqueness, natural diversity, or beauty affirm and celebrate the American experience. The strategy will reflect structural outcomes of implementing these initiatives, including staff, funding, and programs required to ensure success and institutionalize enhanced natural resource management capabilities in the organization. Regional representatives named to the work group are: Jon Jarvis (WRST), Gary Davis (CHIS), Mike Snyder (Intermountain), Jerry Banta (APIS), Suzette Kimball (Southeast), Jim Sherald (National Capital), and Doug Morris (SHEN).

**BACKLOG IDENTIFICATION AND FEE DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS INCLUDE NATURAL RESOURCES** As part of a Departmental initiative to develop project funding for FY 1999 and possibly beyond, natural resource projects are being included. The Associate's office assisted the Budget Division in interpreting how the Department's backlog criteria should be applied to natural resource projects, but the basic criteria were issued by the Department. For purposes of this initiative, the backlog of natural resource projects is NOT all natural resource-related projects that need to be done, or all documented project needs. Rather, to meet the Department's definition, the backlog for this initiative is a subset of the total need involving projects that are ready to be undertaken to address known, immediate threats. This definition excludes projects that would help understand, identify, and define threats to resources.

The backlog initiative follows and is in addition to but does not include identification of fee demonstration projects. The fee demonstration program, initially included 50 "projects" and now includes up to 100 "projects" involving over 100 parks (where "projects" are fee demonstration parks or groups of parks managed by one superintendent). Superintendents of the fee demonstration projects identify individual projects for funding. Parks that do not collect fees are eligible for some of the funding through the "20%" portion that is managed in Washington. An important criterion for fee projects, because they are funded by visitor-generated revenues, is that they are visible or otherwise fairly easily discernible as important by visitors. As a result of the FY 1998 Interior Appropriations Act, NPS

will be allowed to keep all of its fee revenues at the demonstration projects, significantly expanding the previously anticipated funding. To date, only enough projects to meet the smaller anticipated funding amount have been identified. Fee demonstration projects identified to date are largely maintenance-oriented, due in part to confusion caused by report language. Subsequent discussions with Hill staff have indicated that NPS was overly narrow in interpreting that only facility and visitor-related maintenance backlogs were intended to be addressed.

Natural and cultural resource backlogs are eligible. Instructions related to future project identification to be developed by the Associate Director for Operations, who has responsibility for this program--should clarify this issue. These should be issued in early January. Park natural resource staff should be cognizant of fee demonstration backlog efforts in their parks.

**SHENANDOAH NP AND MERCK PROJECT XL (eXcellence and Leadership).** After nearly 2 years of arduous negotiations, the Final Project Agreement (FPA) for the Merck Project XL was signed in December. Acting Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks is expected to sign the agreement for the Department and NPS. Once implemented, the project should result in substantial sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions reductions, to help improve visibility and reduce acidic deposition impacts at the park. EPA has committed to work with NPS and fund monitoring/research at the park concerning volatile organic compounds (VOCs); the project allows emissions of these compounds to increase significantly.

**EASTERN AIR "SUMMIT"** The nature, extent and magnitude of air pollution problems in eastern NPS units are more severe than in other parts of the country; similarly, management options for addressing these problems are more numerous, with several imminent opportunities for influencing pending policy and regulatory decisions. Consequently, Superintendents, park resource managers, chief scientists, and regional management officials from NARO, MARO, SERO, SHEN, GRSM, ACAD, CACO, and MACA traveled to WASO for a day-long "summit" with the Air Resources Division. The purposes of the meeting were to share information on the air quality trends and pollution effects on park resources; to discuss emerging regional planning arenas and pending regulatory actions; and to begin development of a coordinated, strategic plan for influencing air pollution control decisions on a regional, local, and national scale. A detailed work plan will be circulated in January.

**CHANNEL ISLANDS FLOOD** On December 5, 1997, over 11 inches of rain fell in a 24-hour period on the Scorpion Creek watershed on Santa Cruz Island, Channel Islands National Park. Scorpion Creek flooded causing substantial impacts to historic ranch buildings and park facilities, including a campground. Several structures were literally washed downstream to the ocean. An NPS Incident Team was formed to assist the park in recovering from the flood. The Water Resources Division assisted the Scorpion Creek Flood Incident Team by conducting an on-site hydrologic and geomorphic assessment of the flood. The flood was accompanied by massive amounts of sediment delivery to the Scorpion Creek channel. The channel filled in and is now completely obliterated in the vicinity of the developments. The situation is such that the site is now extremely vulnerable to future flooding from significantly smaller storms than that which occurred on December 5. The park was advised that short-term emergency actions may be warranted to reduce the risk of additional damage from future storms this winter, while decisions are made regarding the long-term occupation of the valley.

**MONTANA WATER RIGHTS COMPACT** The WRD assisted Department of Justice

in responding to a request filed by an objector to the preliminary decree for the National Park Service-Montana Compact. The United States filed with the Montana Water Court responses to interrogatories and requests for admission and for production of documents from Robert Gilbert, whose well is located within the Soda Butte Creek drainage. The next step in the adjudication process could be a hearing.

I&M REPORT RELEASED Printed copies of the 1996 Annual Report of the Inventory and Monitoring Program were distributed to NPS units with significant natural resources, region, support offices, and various other entities. The report has five major parts. Part I features brief descriptions of the 11 NPS units that have been conducting prototype ecological monitoring. Part II are reproductions of fact sheets about inventories of natural resources in the 11 NPS units. Part III provides descriptions of the values and status of natural resources in these units. Part IV is a description of data management in the program, and Part V is a report of the Inventory and Monitoring Training Program. The report is amply illustrated and features a comprehensive directory of key contacts in the Inventory and Monitoring Program. Hard copies of the report are available from Dr. Gary Williams, Manager of the program (e-mail: gary\_williams@nps.gov). The electronic copy may be viewed at <http://www.aqd.nps.gov/i&mann96/01cover.htm>).

CONTAMINANT TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP HOLDS FIRST WORK SESSION -The first work session of the NPS Contaminant Technical Advisory Group (CTAG) was convened in Denver in early December. Representatives from the Water and Geologic Resources Divisions, Environmental Quality Division, and Facility Management Division - Hazardous Waste Team were present. The group originally met last August to discuss means to respond to park technical assistance requests which clearly require coordinated input from the four divisions, each of which have different staff expertise and servicewide responsibilities. The group is specifically concerned with responding to park requests with consistent recommendations on contaminant standards, action levels, and applicable legislative. The group held preliminary discussions on abandoned mineral lands (AML) on NPS lands, an issue presently receiving attention and funding by Congress. Case histories discussed at the meeting included ongoing situations at a contaminated drilling site at Padre Island National Seashore, contaminated active mining sites in the Desert Parks, and abandoned uranium mine tailings outside Arches National Park. A subgroup made up of one representative from each Division was established as a coordinating mechanism and contact points for the field when these multi-disciplinary issues arise. Additional meetings on the Desert Parks and AML are planned for early next year. In the interim, each office is generating a list of responsibilities, which will be compiled into a master list to reveal where redundancies exist and to provide the field with the appropriate Division to contact.

#### HEADS UP

RMP AND IAR DATABASE UPDATES Requests for updates of Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Investigator's Annual Report (IAR) databases have been sent to the field. Parks should be on the lookout for instructions from their regions. The data are submitted to WASO through the regions, rather than directly to WASO by parks. This year, the request for RMP updates includes tables indicating parks with RMPs known by WASO to be expiring at the end of calendar year 1997 and parks for which WASO has no RMPs on file. Having data in the RMP database is not the same thing as having an approved, up-to-date RMP. The call for RMP updates also included summary guidance about RMP requirements, as there appears to be confusion in the field about this.

ADVISORY GROUPS MEETING The Science Needs Issues Forum is meeting the end of January and the Natural Resource Advisory Group at the end of February.

#### PROGRESS

FEDERAL AIR QUALITY-RELATED VALUES GROUP MEETS Representatives of the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Forest Service met December 3 in Denver to continue the collective effort to develop consistent criteria and procedures for assessing air pollution effects on air quality related values. The draft workplans, including funding needs, for the Ozone, Deposition, Visibility, and Policy and Procedures subgroups were presented, discussed and revised. Key field and Washington office staff will be asked to review the subgroup plans to ensure they meet their needs. The draft Phase 1 subgroup reports (addressing short-term tasks) will be presented and discussed at a May 19-20, 1998, FLAG meeting. The subgroup reports will be compiled into the FLAG Phase 1 Report which will be distributed for Agency, then public, review during the Summer and Fall of 1998.

RED HILLS POWER PROJECT ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT OUT FOR COMMENT - Natural Resource Program Center offices, including Air, Geologic and Water Resources, and Natchez Trace Parkway staff recently commented on the preliminary draft EIS for the proposed Red Hills Power Project. The project is a proposed 4000-acre lignite coal strip mine to provide feedstock to an adjacent 400-megawatt coal fired power plant. The 37-year power project will parallel Natchez Trace Parkway for approximately 5 miles. In its comments, NPS cited significant data gaps and the need for large amounts of data gathering and interpretation to quantify and qualify the significant risk to the Parkway's natural, cultural, and historic resources. In addition to resource impacts, the proposed power plant project and mine may adversely impact visitor safety and the existing visitor experience. A significant legal "handle" exists through the Mississippi Surface Mining and Reclamation Act of 1977 that potentially gives the NPS joint approval authority with the State on the mine permit, if environmental studies prove adverse impact to Natchez Trace Parkway from the proposed mine. For this reason the NPS must insure that the preliminary draft EIS for the Red Hills Power Project includes sufficient information to fully assess adverse impacts to park resources from the proposal. The NRPC staff will continue to assist Natchez Trace Parkway through the environmental documentation and permitting process.

NPS/DOI COMMENT ON EPA'S PROPOSED REGIONAL HAZE RULE: On December 5, the Department submitted comments on EPA's proposed rule for addressing regional haze problems in national parks and wilderness areas. Relying substantially on the NPS comments, the Department generally supported EPA's proposal, but suggested several improvements to the proposal. These included: (1) establishing a more uniform method for determining "baseline" conditions in Class I areas (EPA had proposed a flexible, state-by-state approach); (2) requiring that measures adopted by the states achieve faster progress toward the national visibility goal (under EPA's proposal, natural conditions would not be achieved until 2050 in the cleanest areas and 2300+ in the East); and (3) allowing states some flexibility in complying with the statutory requirement that all major stationary sources that cause or contribute to visibility impairment in Class I areas install the best available retrofit technology (i.e., allowing states to obtain BART-equivalent reductions through other means). EPA also received several thousand postcards depicting good and bad visibility conditions at Great Smoky Mountains NP from activists across the

country; the photos were acquired from the NPS visibility monitoring network and distributed by the Clean Air Network. EPA is expected to issue a final regulation in April 1998.

GPRA Natural Resource staff in WASO continue to try to refine technical guidance on GPRA goal reporting requirements. The Strategic Planning Office appointed a task force of regional representatives and Abby Miller to oversee revision of guidance on natural resource related GPRA goals. The task force is headed by Paul Anderson (ARD, Alaska). It has reviewed the analysis of the park GPRA goals prepared by Strategic Planning's Mike Brown, and has summarized what needs to be done to make the guidance work. WASO staff are now working to get that accomplished and hope to be completed shortly after the Christmas/ New Years holidays. Information from Mike Brown's analysis and from park goals in the Amoeba database will also be used to improve the goals in the future. However, at this time, only changes consistent with the wording of the Strategic Plan were possible. Personnel working on these goals are: Threatened and Endangered Species, Peggy Olwell; Disturbed lands/exotics, Gary Johnston; Disturbed lands/other, Dave Steenson; Inventories, Gary Williams; Water quality, Bill Jackson; Air quality, Miguel Flores.

#### PROFESSIONAL MEETING ATTENDANCE/PAPERS

IPM PAPER PRESENTED Jil Swearingen, IPM Coordinator for the National Capitol Region and Gary Johnston, WASO Natural Systems Management Office, coauthored a paper presented at the December 1997 meeting of the Entomological Society of America. Jil presented the paper and participated in a panel discussion. Panel members included representatives from the U. S. Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, Agricultural Research Service The topic of Jil's presentation was on Biocontrol in the National Park Service. This was one of several presentations at a symposium sponsored by the Biological Resources Division (USGS). The symposium was on the use of biocontrol agents in natural/protected areas.