

**The Background to  
Resources Management Plans  
in the National Park Service**

Some parks have had some form of a Resource Management Plan (RMP) since the mid-1960s, but not every park had a plan and the plans were not consistent in content and format. Around 1980, several things caused the National Park Service to focus on improving its resource management planning process.

**1979**

The National Parks and Conservation Association released a survey of resource problems in about 200 parks. Entitled the **Adjacent Lands Survey**, the survey attracted attention and was felt to be one reason Congress asked for the "State of the Parks" report.

**1980**

The **State of the Parks** report to Congress listed more than 4,000 threats to the aesthetic qualities, and the cultural and natural resources in units of the National Park System. The report also found that only about 25 percent of the threats were adequately documented and that only 1 of 3 parks had an approved RMP.

The **State of the Parks** report to Congress received considerable attention from the Congress, the press, conservationists and the public. It provided the Service with a new point of reference for doing something about threats to the resources. It made park employees more aware of the problems in their park and other parks. And it provided a catalyst for the Service to reaffirm its efforts in resources inventory, monitoring, research and management. In July 1980, Congress requested the Service to develop a prevention and mitigation plan that would address the problems noted in the **State of the Parks** report.

The **State of the Parks: Servicewide Strategy for Prevention and Mitigation of Natural and Cultural Resources Management Problems** was completed in December 1980 and was presented to Congress in January 1981. The strategy called for each park to have a comprehensive Resource Management Plan (RMP) approved by the end of 1981. The Resource Management Plans written in response to the Servicewide threat prevention/mitigation strategy were to

- (1) include an inventory of park resources and a detailed program for monitoring and managing the resources,
- (2) specify necessary staff and funding, and

- (3) assign priorities to projects so that resources provided could be allocated toward the most serious problems.

The plans were to be updated annually and used in formulating annual NPS budgets beginning with fiscal year 1984.

## 1987

A GAO review of the Service's resource management program, entitled **Limited Progress Made in Documenting and Mitigating Threats to the Parks**, noted that some parks did not have an approved RMP even though they were required to be completed by the end of 1981, others had not updated their RMPs, parks were generally not following consistent guidance in preparing RMPs, and RMPs were generally not being used in formulating the Service's budget.

To provide the information needed for the Service to develop a comprehensive, systemwide approach to protect and manage park resources and to provide the basis to make more informed funding decisions, the 1987 GAO report recommended that the National Park Service

- enforce the agency's requirement that Resource Management Plans be prepared and updated in accordance with established National Park Service guidance and criteria at each park and
- improve procedures on the use of the information provided in the Resource Management Plans to (1) identify and prioritize cultural and natural resource management needs on a regional and Servicewide basis and (2) prepare annual budget requests.

The 1987 GAO report concluded that "Without complete, current, and consistent RMPs and a process for using the RMP information to prepare the agency's annual budget request and make funding decisions, there has been no assurance the funds received were used to address the most serious resource management problems".

## 1988

The **Natural Resources Assessment and Action Program (NRAAP)** report described Systemwide Action Programs being implemented that included the revision of guidelines for park Resource Management Plans to assure uniform resource status data and tracking mechanisms to monitor expenditures and project completion.

