

REMARKS OF RUSSELL E. DICKENSON, DIRECTOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, TO THE ASSOCIATION OF NATIONAL PARK RANGERS AT THE RANGER RENDEZVOUS, LAKE TAHOE, OCTOBER 22, 1981

WITHOUT THE RESOURCES THERE WOULD BE LITTLE PURPOSE FOR PEOPLE TO SEEK OUT THE PARKS. AT THE SAME TIME, WITHOUT PEOPLE SEEKING OUT THE PARKS THERE WOULD BE LITTLE SUPPORT FOR PROTECTING THE RESOURCES. OUR DUAL MANDATE, TO PROTECT THE RESOURCES AND TO PROVIDE FOR THEIR ENJOYMENT, IS NOT A SET OF PRIORITIES BUT A SINGLE ONE THAT ENCOMPASSES BOTH PRESERVATION AND USE, APPROPRIATE USE, THAT WILL LEAVE THE RESOURCES UNIMPAIRED FOR THE ENJOYMENT OF FUTURE GENERATIONS.

AS I SEE IT, THE PARK RANGER, RESOURCE SPECIALIST, MAINTENANCE PERSONNEL, SCIENTIST, AND INTERPRETER MUST FUNCTION AS A WELL OILED MACHINE IF WE ARE TO FULFILL OUR PROPER MANDATES.

IT IS TIME TO STRENGTHEN AND ENHANCE THE SERVICE'S INTERPRETIVE EFFORT, BUT NOT AS AN END IN ITSELF. IT MUST BE AN INTEGRATED PART OF OUR OVERALL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM. PROPERLY UTILIZED, I BELIEVE IT IS THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE WAY TO MINIMIZE USER-CAUSED DAMAGE, TO ENHANCE VISITOR ENJOYMENT, TO REDUCE ACCIDENTS AND INJURIES, AND TO DEVELOP PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE PARK SYSTEM AND FOR THE MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS OF THE PARK SERVICE.

PROGRAMS THAT ARE ENTERTAINING BUT NOT REALLY RELEVANT TO THE AREA'S PRIMARY THEMES AND RESOURCES BELONG IN AMUSEMENT PARKS, NOT NATIONAL PARKS. SOME OF OUR DEMONSTRATIONS, LIVING HISTORY ACTIVITIES, AND CULTURAL PROGRAMS ARE HIGHLY RELEVANT TO OUR AREAS AND HELP ACHIEVE MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES. BUT, OTHERS COMMIT SIZEABLE CHUNKS OF OUR PERSONNEL AND DOLLARS TO INTERPRETING MINUTIA AND TRIVIA, OR VERY LOW PRIORITY THEMES OF NO REAL RELEVANCE TO OUR RESOURCES AND MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES.

SOMETIMES WE FALL INTO THE TRAP OF DEVELOPING EDUCATION PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO COVER AN ENTIRE SUBJECT, TO SAVE THE WORLD FOR MANKIND, OR TO TURN EVERYONE INTO A PRACTICING ECOLOGIST. THESE ARE "FINE" GOALS BUT OUR PRIMARY MISSION IS TO INTERPRET THE RESOURCES OF OUR PARKS, NOT TO FUNCTION AS NATURAL HISTORY OR HISTORY EDUCATORS.

INTERPRETATION CAN BE USED AS AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS TOOL WITH THE POTENTIAL FOR ACHIEVING A VARIETY OF OBJECTIVES.

FIRST, INTERPRETATION CAN SIGNIFICANTLY ENHANCE THE VISITOR'S ENJOYMENT AND UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR PARK EXPERIENCE. MOST VISITORS COME TO NATIONAL PARKS TO SEE AND EXPERIENCE NEW THINGS AND OUR PROGRAMS CAN IMPROVE THE VISITOR'S ABILITY TO OBSERVE AND PERCEIVE. WE CAN ALSO ENHANCE THEIR ENJOYMENT BY INSURING THAT THEY ARE AWARE OF THE RULES, REGULATIONS, AND THE HAZARDS OF THE AREA. A LOST, INJURED, OR ARRESTED VISITOR IS NOT HAVING AN ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE.

SECOND, INTERPRETIVE SERVICES CAN SIGNIFICANTLY AID IN THE PROTECTION OF THE PARK'S RESOURCES BY INCREASING THE VISITOR'S AWARENESS OF PARK VALUES AND OF THE NEGATIVE IMPACT THEY CAN MAKE ON THOSE VALUES THROUGH CARELESS ACTS OR INAPPROPRIATE USE.

THIRD, THESE SERVICES CAN IMPROVE THE PUBLIC'S UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT OF THE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS THAT THE PRESERVATION OF THE PARK'S RESOURCES IMPOSES ON THEIR USE AND MANAGEMENT. HUMAN/WILDLIFE INTERACTION, NATURAL FIRE, EXOTIC SPECIES, HUMAN USE IMPACTS, ETC. AN INFORMED PUBLIC IS MORE LIKELY TO SUPPORT OUR POLICIES, BUT WE HAVE TO GIVE THEM THE INFORMATION ON WHY THE POLICIES EXIST. VISITORS ARE ON VACATION, NOT IN SCHOOL. THIS INFORMATION SHOULD BE INTEGRATED INTO PARK RELEVANT INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS, NOT SERIOUS LECTURES.

(10)

FOURTH, INTERPRETIVE ACTIVITIES CAN TEACH RESOURCE BASED RECREATION SKILLS COMPLETE WITH THE APPROPRIATE SAFETY AND MINIMUM IMPACT ATTITUDES AND KNOWLEDGE NECESSARY TO PROTECT THE RESOURCES AND OUR VISITORS. THEY ALSO CAN AID IN DISTRIBUTING USE AWAY FROM IMPACTED AREAS, SENSITIVE OR FRAGILE ENVIRONMENTS, ETC., A FORM OF VISITOR USE MANAGEMENT.

FINALLY, THESE SERVICES CAN IMPROVE THE PUBLIC'S UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF THIS NATION'S NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE AND HELP THEM TO UNDERSTAND THEIR DEPENDENCE ON AND INTERRELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR PAST. THIS, OF COURSE, SHOULD BE BASED ON THE STORY OF THE RESOURCES AND SYSTEM EXISTENT WITHIN THE PARK BEING INTERPRETED. IN THIS SENSE, WE CAN BE A VALUABLE PART OF THE NATION'S FORMAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

THE ROLE OF INTERPREATION IS TO ENRICH EACH VISITOR'S PARK EXPERIENCE. IF ENRICHMENT DOES NOT OCCUR -- IF A VISITOR IS NOT TOUCHED -- WE HAVE FAILED.
