



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

February 20, 1980

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Memorandum

To: All Regional Chiefs, Interpretation & Visitor Services

From: Chief, Division of Interpretation and Visitor Services

Subject: Ivory Towers Notes

In the olden days, in a strange land, the leader of a revolutionary movement published a book of his thoughts for his people to meditate on and live by. I can't recall the exact wording, but one of the proverbs in Chairman Mao's little red book went something like, "A man who senses the wind of change should build not a windbreak, but a windmill."

I'm neither a follower nor advocate of the thoughts of Chairman Mao, but the proverb is a fitting message for park interpreters to meditate upon at this point in our history. There are changes in the wind and all the data at hand points toward even more changes ahead. When something you are dedicated to is threatened by change, the natural tendency is to hunker down and defend our status quo. For example, build a "windbreak." In this approach our energies are spent in reacting and defending. The "windmill" approach, on the other hand, results in using the wind to create additional energy, an active rather than reactive approach.

We all know that interpretation has never been fully utilized, funded and supported as a major management tool. At no time is this more apparent than during a period of severe fiscal constraint like we are currently experiencing. The above statement may be a fact, but it is not a good justification for getting more support. Using what resources we do have to show management that interpretation can be a major and effective management tool is the only way to gain the support we need.

The changes, or at least the results of the changes affecting us, are obvious. Budget reductions, manpower reductions, travel reductions, central office reductions, energy shortages (and increased cost) inflationary increases attached to everything we do, visitation changes, new programs to implement, special initiatives to carry out, etc. Business as usual is no longer a viable option.

The desirable response to these changes is not so obvious. Reduction of our activities; increased reliance on self-guiding, self-discovery; more dependence on VIPs and cooperating associations to keep the "best" of our activities alive all seem to be hard drawn conclusions. Unfortunately, they are reactive (windbreak) rather than active (windmill) responses to the emerging needs and opportunities.

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As the fiscal constraints continue, the Service is being forced to face up to a very real priority sequence for distributing the available resources.

Priority #1 - Those programs and activities mandated by legislation and executive orders. (i.e., public health, NEPA, safety, law enforcement, etc.).

Priority #2 - Those programs and activities essential to the accomplishment of our legislative mandate.

Priority #3 - Those programs and activities desirable to enable us to achieve the mission of the Service and the goals of the administration.

Priority #4 - All other.

Most interpreters would argue that our programs and activities are either essential or at the very best desirable. Rather than getting into a philosophical debate, I would just point out that management makes the final decisions. A brief check of our operating programs and positions should tell you that they place an awful lot of what we do in the desirable or all other priority. Somewhere along the line OMB, the Department, WASO and/or Regional management, and many park superintendents have decided that there is a lot of fluff contained in this thing called interpretation.

The fact that many of these "softer" programs are funded by cooperating associations or conducted by VIPs doesn't change the fact that we value them high enough to commit the funds and personnel. This kind of logic reflects on our overall image whether we like the judgement or not.

Preserving park resources and resource based use are the bottom line. Much of what we do is perceived as activity based - enough said. Its time to sense the changes and build some windmills, our windbreaks are crumbling!

In the past year or two, probably the most substantive accomplishments in interpretive and visitor services are several that are thoroughly unglamorous, but should have a profound long-term beneficial effect on interpretation Servicewide.

These are: The development of serious, well thought out statements for interpretation and visitor services. The documents are not the important thing - the results are. For example, interpretive and visitor service programs clearly tied to the park's management objectives or to Servicewide goals.

Park programs where all activities can be justified as based on real management needs, resource needs and visitor needs. (The operative word is needs as opposed to wants).

Systematic revision of programs based on documented annual analysis of visitor trends and closer integration into the fabric of park management

Unglamorous because they involved a lot of paper and a lot of hard decisions to drop or modify "successful" programs well liked by the visitors and the interpreters (and frequently by the park management).

Substantive because they move interpretation and visitor services into the essential priority or at least high on the desirable list.

They deal with "threats to the parks" in a professional manner. They help visitors understand and support park management policies and programs, they reduce adverse impacts on park resources, they reduce maintenance problems caused by visitor related (nonintentional) damage. They reduce protection needs due to better informed park users. And because this is done by dedicated interpreters, they still accomplish the job of increasing the visitor awareness of the park resource values and enhance the enjoyment of all who participate.

It's done by acting--not reacting. By starting from a truly "0" base and building a program, not by attempting to save the successful or popular activities and modifying or eliminating the rest.

- End of lecture -

Some bits and pieces

Reorganization of WASO Division of Interpretation and Visitor Services

The Division is being realigned to respond more directly to current and foreseeable needs of the Service and its public (i.e., meet our 25% reduction mandate).

The cooperating association coordinator (Jim Murfin) and his secretary's position have been moved to WASO from HFC (maximize the division's secretarial staff).

The environmental education position held by Stan Lock has been vacated (Stan transferred to NCR to a resource management position) we are currently in the process of recruiting a cultural resources (historian) interpretive specialist.

The VIP coordinator position (Betty Murphy) is to be given up in the reduction effort. These duties will be placed in a new position description being developed vice Roy Gaybill's old position. (Roy will be filling a visitor services specialist position when a move ~~for~~ Betty allows us to implement this effort).

The second environmental education position (now occupied by Audrey Dixon) will be redesigned as an interpretive specialist with emphasis on both natural resources and environmental education.

The end results of all the above:

- 1 - Division Chief, Interpretation and Visitor Services
- 1 - Interpretive Specialist/Visitor Services
- 1 - Interpretive Specialist/Cultural Resources
- 1 - Interpretive Specialist/Natural Resources and Environmental Ed.
- 1 - Cooperating Association Coordinator
- 2 - Clerical support

One other possibility is starting to ferment. The existing Division of Environmental Education, Science and Technology may be abolished and the duties and position (1) moved to interpretation. Nothing firm on this yet.

New training booklet

The new handbook "Interpreting for Park Visitors" a replacement for the old how to- booklets is now at the printers. We hope to have the first year's supply to the field in time for this summer's use. Keep in mind future year's supplies (new seasonals, etc.) will have to be ordered by you. WASO is going out of the business of being a yearly supplier. Information on this will come with the new handbooks.

Regional office reorganizations (re-Interpretation)

Two of our regional chiefs have transferred, one has retired, and another has announced his early out. The results in terms of regional office interpretive organization is mixed:

NCR - Gene Colbert retired. This position was abolished. Rock Comstock is in charge of both interpretation and urban programs without the two layer set-up that use to exist.

SERO - Walt Bruce transferred to Horseshoe Bend as superintendent. Bill Kaye was reassigned to a new cultural resource division as regional curator. The Division of Interpretation was abolished. Mike Strock is now an interpretive specialist reporting to a new Division of Resource and Visitor Management headed up by Art Graham.

(Norm Bishop is still on board, but his position is slated for reduction once he transfers).

NARO - Jim Corson transferred into WASO to a position in International Affairs. The decision is still pending on maintaining a separate division of interpretation or going to the SERO type organization. The chief's position has been given up in the reduction effort so there will be a loss one way or another.

SWRO - Doug Evans has announced his retirement. No action has occurred yet, so I can't report any results.

Summary

Interpretation, as it has been perceived by Regional Office managers, is being weighed and found wanting. We seem to be in the low third and fourth priorities. Think about it when you're meditating on windbreaks vs windmills.

Environmental/Energy Education

Despite all the confusion and mixed signals, it's alive and more (or less) well. We are being asked, very forcefully, by the Assistant Secretary to do more. The Director is backing efforts to get this program on line and visible once again. A task force of field people will assemble in Harpers Ferry March 3-7th to develop new guideline standards, and some model program ideas. Eighteen selected parks around the country are getting special funding to develop some renewal energy exhibits in cooperation with the Solar Energy Research Institute in Golden, Colorado. The outgrowth is a successful program in Grand Teton developed by the RMRO last year.

Threats to the Parks

The banner for the new year. This is very high on the Director's priority list. We will be expected to do our part. After all, public education is what we are suppose to be about. More--much more will be coming out on this program in the very near future. A combined effort involving resource management, public affairs and interpretation.

Annual Statement for Interpretation and Visitor Services

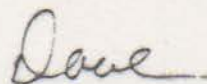
From reading the Regional minutes most of you are well into this program. It's developing a lot of credibility with the front hall--proof that we're trying to maximize our efforts in the essential level. If your region is going, don't forget to send me informational copies from each park as they are approved by the Regional Directors. I need the information for ammunition at this end.

If you have'nt started yet, I advise you to do so soon.

Regional Chiefs Conference

The next conference is tentatively set for October in Cape Cod, in conjunction with the 1980 national meeting at the Association of Interpretive Naturalist. Their schedule is for the 6th-11th. (Next fiscal year hope the travel crunch is improved from this year). I'll get you more information on this after I see more of what AIN is planning.

If you have topics you would like to see on our agenda, please let me know your wishes.



Dave Dame