



# Meeting the Challenge in Alaska

Natural Resources Challenge Update - April, 2000

## ADMINISTRATION

The Anchorage Support Office and the Alaska Regional Office had a Natural Resources Challenge (NRC) kick-off meeting in March, 2000. The discussion focused on identifying an overall strategy for implementing the NRC in our region, and what the primary issues of concern for that strategy are. Susan Huse volunteered to take on the role NRC Coordinator, although it was recognized that a meaningful implementation would require the combined efforts of staff throughout the region.

Action Items identified include:

- Create a website, within AKSOweb, for internal communication;
- Create a working group to help advise on overall NRC implementation, and focus groups for each strategy;
- Take stock of where we are – what have we already done and what are we doing on each strategy;
- Coordinate with other regions and WASO on implementation;
- Be ready for upcoming funding, and be accountable with the funds we receive;
- Generate as much excitement as possible.

**New Website:** - there is a new Intranet website for the Alaska Region and the NRC. It is dynamic, highlighting the latest news, as well as background information. Simply type **aksoweb/nrc** with your web browser, and check it out. Copies of this newsletter, our February brochure, budget information and links to the national website are all included.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**ACS meeting** – during the week of April 17, the Alaska Council of Superintendents will be meeting in Anchorage. Susan Huse will be making a presentation on the NRC – what it is and what we are doing with it.

**Inventory Scoping meeting** – April 25 – 27, the Inventory program is sponsoring a Biological Inventory Scoping Meeting. The primary purposes of this meeting are to launch the I&M program in Alaska, and to identify and prioritize biological inventories for each network. For more information contact Sara Wesser at 257-2557.

## CONNECTING PARKS TO PROTECTED AREAS AND PARKS TO PEOPLE

**Inventory** – The *Biological Inventories program* is underway, and Sara Wesser is the Inventory and Monitoring Coordinator. The program works under a model of sharing resources and expertise within park networks. Alaska has four networks: Northwest, Central, Southwest, and Southeast.

The first Inventory scoping meeting will be held in Anchorage, April 25-27, 2000, and all Alaska biological resources specialists and managers are invited. The purpose of the meeting is to identify and prioritize biological inventories for each network.

Biological Inventory FY00 funds are being used to produce habitat stratification maps for Alaska parks. These maps will be developed using the *Ecological Regions of Alaska* map, in press for summer 2000. AKSO staff led the Interagency Mapping



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Team for Alaska that produced the Ecological Regions map.

The first phase of the *Water Inventories* is funded for all parks in Alaska in FY00. The project will use a stratification approach developed with GIS tools and statistical analysis to describe and quantify the hydrologic landscapes in the parks. The field inventory will be conducted based on the stratification and a monitoring network designed. This project is a joint effort between NPS-Alaska and USGS Alaska Water Resources with technical guidance from the USGS National Research Program. A final report of this first phase will be available by December 00. (Contact: Nancy Deschu, AKSO).

**Monitoring** – The Central Alaska Network (DENA, WRST, YUCH) is expected to receive FY02 funding for Vital Signs monitoring. Sara Wesser is already beginning the planning process for implementing this program.

The Denali is finishing the conceptual design for its Long-Term Ecological Monitoring program, and presenting it to the national Inventory and Monitoring Steering Committee in May. Denali has received a funding increase in FY00, to \$485,000. These funds will be partly used to hire monitoring personnel, including a shared position with Interpretation.

**Collaboration** – Mike Soukup, Director of Natural Resources, will be visiting in April to explore the possibility of a Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit (CESU) with the University of Alaska. The Institute for Social and Economic Research is already part of a University of Washington CESU. [See also Parks for Science]

**Resource Planning** – NRAC is currently revising its regionwide natural resources strategic plan. Presently, action items and timelines for meeting goals in four strategic focus areas are being developed. The plan is expected to be ready for acceptance this fiscal year.

Several of the parks have initiated work on their backcountry/wilderness management plans, which will be complex multiyear planning efforts. DENA is farthest along in the process with initial public scoping completed. GAAR and WRST will be starting public scoping this year.

**Parks for Science** – The Alaska Region responded to the USGS informal request for research priorities. These priorities were: 1) State of Natural Resources in Alaska National Parks, 2) Alaska National Parks as Monitors of Healthy Ecosystems, 3) Alaska National Parks as Geologic Classrooms for a New Millennium, and 4) Alaska National Parks Waters as Environmental Indicators.

NPS continues to conduct scientific investigations throughout our parks, as well as partnering with BRD, and other agencies.

**Parks for Learning** – Kenai Fjords has been awarded on the order of \$180,000 for the creation of a new Learning Center in conjunction with the Seward Sea Life Center. Learning Centers are to facilitate education of park visitors, researchers, and the public at large. Denali has also put forward a proposal for a Learning Center in the future.

Bob Barbee is very interested in improving the natural resources program record of incorporating layman publications into research projects, following the lead of the Cultural Resources Program. Projects in WEAR are already requiring informational



products to be included in their projects. We will be building on these successes to improve our public education of natural resources research.

Denali will be using LTEM and Fee Demo funding to hire a new interpretative position. The position will be an education specialist, working on resource-based educational programs and curricula. The intent is to educate people of all ages about the research and resources of Denali. Hands-on programs will also be developed to allow kids to get involved with "real science" occurring in the park. The position will work on communicating the ways that science is being used to manage the park.

The USGS has developed a series of Fact Sheets, 2- or 4-page educational brochures describing a geologic (or other) feature in a park. Fact Sheets already describe geology in GLBA and KATM, as well as the integrated science approach for studying Lake Clark. These Fact Sheets are versatile in that they can be distributed to the public on paper at visitor centers and other locations, and distributed around the country via the web. Resource specialists are very interested in creating a series of these Fact Sheets about resources in Alaska parks.

#### PROVIDING LEADERSHIP FOR A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

**Environmental Stewardship** – All parks will be undergoing environmental audits over the next 3 years. WRST, KEFJ, and LACL will be audited this summer, and DENA, YUGA, and WEAR are in line for Summer 2001. Contact: Lucy Gonyea for more information.

**Air Quality** – The Alaska region has been very active in influencing the

implementation of the Air Quality strategy of the NRC. Andrea Blakesley, who has been the air quality specialist for Denali, and Bud Rice, who has just become the regional coordinator, were both involved in revisions of the Air Quality Action Plan. They have created a working group to develop a regional plan for building an air quality monitoring network that addresses needs of all Alaska parks. This will build off the existing and historic monitoring stations. Funding for implementation may become available in FY01.

**Water Resources** – Nancy Deschu is coordinating several new water studies in Alaska parks making use of new funding available from the Administration's Clean Water Action Plan. The study needs are defined by NPS, but the studies are designed and conducted jointly with USGS-WRD. Some of the current studies include: Alagnak River, KATM; Tlikakila River, LACL; Kandik, Nation, Yukon rivers, YUCH; Southside tributaries, DENA; Kobuk River, WEAR, GAAR. In addition, funding from NPS-WRD is supporting several new and ongoing projects: water management plan, KATM; floodplain delineation, DENA; wetland mapping, LACL; lake study, LACL. Eleven new proposals will be submitted to these two sources in May '00 to compete for FY01 funds. (Contact: Nancy Deschu, AKSO).

**Foundations of Stewardship** – The Alaska Regional Office has begun the process of hiring a Science Advisor. This position will greatly help staff throughout the parks in conducting research and in improving the use of research results in policy and management decisions.

A recent servicewide process was completed to upgrade natural resources staff positions. The Alaska region was



found to have already adequately graded NR positions, and little changes were made.

### PROTECTING NATIVE SPECIES AND THEIR HABITAT

**Nonnative Species** – This year starts a new investigation of the nature and extent of nonnative species problems in Alaska parklands. The project will identify critical areas where control efforts should be focused in the short term, and propose a set of criteria that will help to promote and guide the development of a long-term strategy for the evaluation and control of exotic plants within the region. Field work will be focused in DENA, WRST and KEFJ, parks with disturbed lands along road corridors. The project is funded by the Service's new Biological Resources Division for \$50,000. [Contact Page Spencer, AKSO or Carl Roland, DENA]

Klondike Goldrush, in a separate project, is identifying and mapping exotic plants in the Chilkoot and White Pass units. [Contact Elaine Furbish, KLGO]

**Native & Endangered Species** – The inventory and monitoring program will be compiling information on native species throughout Alaska parklands. Many other research projects on native flora and fauna are being conducted in all parks.

Currently, little work is being performed in Alaska parks on Endangered or Threatened species. The stellar sea lion is listed and does haulout with KEFJ boundaries.

### BEYOND ALASKA

**Servicewide** – A Natural Resources Challenge Superintendents' Council has been created to help guide and promote

the NRC. The Council includes 2 representatives from each region; Alaska is represented by Steve Martin (DENA) and Tomie Lee (GLBA). The Council is to serve as advocates and communicators for the NRC to all superintendents, focusing on advocacy, accountability, and funding allocation.

**Pacific West Region** – This region is working on revising the Resource Planning strategy of the NRC, and are reviewing "The Detailed Action Plan for Native and Endangered Species". They have presented a workshop on how to conduct a vital signs scoping workshop, to help staff in each PWR network begin the process of conducting Inventory and Monitoring programs.

### OPPORTUNITIES

***Anyone interested in participating in making the NRC a reality here in Alaska is most welcome!*** It will take the combined efforts of staff at all levels and in all departments to make the most of the Challenge and to fulfill our commitment to natural resource protection in perpetuity. If you have any ideas, please contact Sue Huse, 257-2558.

**Strategy working groups** – each strategy will likely have a small group of individuals who will take the lead in ensuring that the intents of the NRC are implemented and that the goals are met. It is assumed that the groups will consist primarily of those personnel whose duties include implementation activities. If you have interest in a particular strategy, please contact Sue Huse 257-2558.