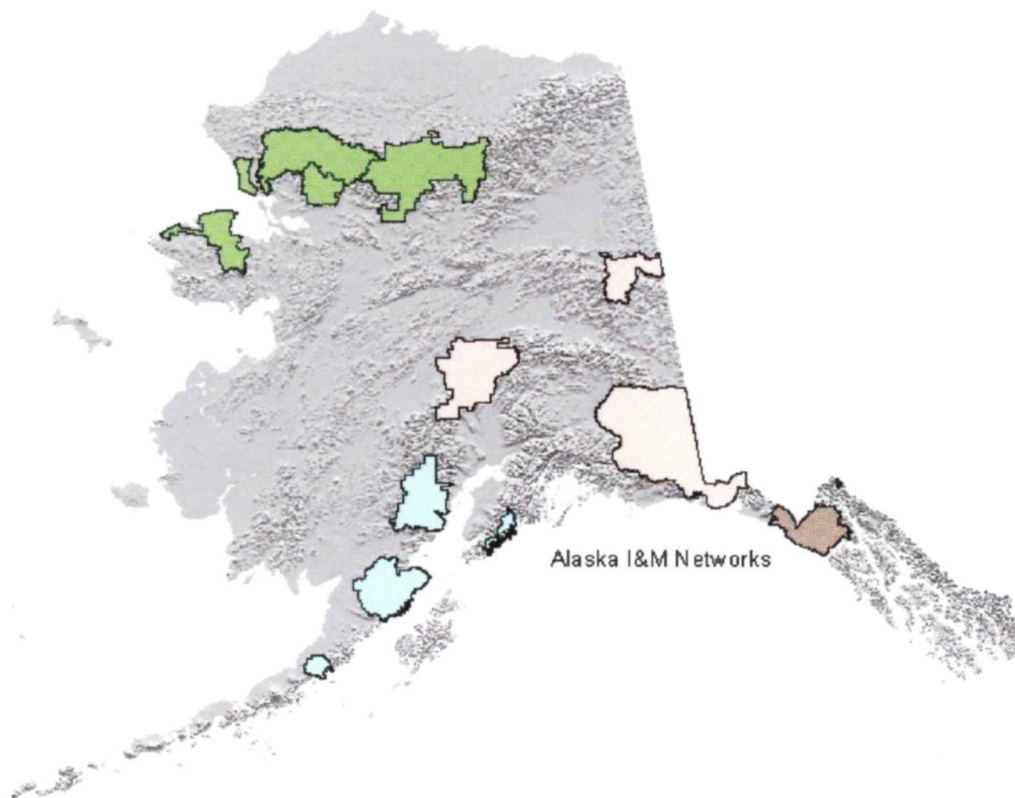


February 9, 2000

The Alaska Region Implements the NPS Natural Resource Challenge



*We must recommit ourselves to natural resource preservation & restoration.
-Director Stanton 1999*



What is the Natural Resource Challenge?

The Natural Resource Challenge (NRC) is a budgeted action plan aimed at restoring the balance of resource preservation with visitation and facilities development - to realign our perspective so that we do not lose sight of our commitment to preserving resources in perpetuity. The first goal of the NPS Strategic Plan stresses our natural resource stewardship role. It is up to each and every member of the NPS to work together to meet that goal.

For most of the 20th century, the National Park Service has practiced a curious combination of active management and passive acceptance of natural systems and processes, while becoming a superb visitor services agency. In the 21st century that management style clearly will be insufficient to save our natural resources. Parks are becoming increasingly crowded remnants of primitive America in a fragmented landscape, threatened by invasions of nonnative species, pollution from near and far, and incompatible uses of resources in and around parks.

The lack of information about park plants, animals, ecosystems, and their interrelationships is profound. If we are to protect these resources into the far future, we must know more. To unlock this information, we need to revitalize and expand our natural resource programs, strengthen partnerships with the scientific community, and share knowledge with educational institutions and the public. The Natural Resource Challenge is the framework for helping NPS fulfill its commitment and preserve natural resources for years to come.



What are the Natural Resource Challenge Goals?

NRC Goals	NPS Mission Goals	NPS Goal Category
1. National parks are preserved so that this generation and future generations can enjoy, benefit, and learn from them.	Ia: Natural and cultural resources and associated values are protected, restored, and maintained in good condition and managed within their broader ecosystem and cultural context.	Goal Category I: Preserve Park Resources
2. Management of the national parks is improved through a greater reliance on scientific knowledge.	Ib: The National Park Service contributes to knowledge about natural and cultural resources and associated values, management decisions about resource and visitors are made on adequate scholarly and scientific information.	
3. Techniques are developed and employed that protect the inherent qualities of national parks and restore natural systems that have been degraded; collaboration with the public and private sectors minimizes degrading influences.	IIa: Visitors safely enjoy and are satisfied with the availability, diversity, and quality of park facilities, services, and appropriate recreational opportunities.	Goal Category II: Provide for public enjoyment and visitor experience of parks.
4. Knowledge gained in national parks through scientific research is promulgated broadly by the National Park Service and others for the benefit of society.	IIb: Park visitors and the general public understand and appreciate the preservation of parks and their resources for this and future generations.	

What are the Three Natural Resource Challenges and Twelve Strategies?

1. Connecting Parks to Protected Areas and Parks to People

Inventory - provide a consistent database of information about our natural resources, including species diversity, abundance and distribution (GPRA long term strategic goal Ib1).

Monitoring - determine the current condition of our resources and how they change over time. Park networks will pick measurable "vital signs" to use for monitoring change (GPRA long term strategic goal Ib3).

Collaboration - work with other professionals to acquire scientific knowledge and achieve mutual resource goals including expanding the network Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units (CESUs) in partnership with USGS and other agencies (GPRA long term strategic goals IIIa1 and IVb).

Resource Planning - manage in accordance with current, park-based plans that protect resources, integrate resource considerations with other operations, and define the park's role in a regional context (GPRA long term strategic goals Ib1, Ib3, Ib4 and Ib5).

Parks for Science - encourage the use of parks as centers for broad scientific research and inquiry. Research should be facilitated in parks where it can be done without impairing other park values (GPRA long term strategic goal Ib1, Ib3, Ib4, and Ib5).

Parks for Learning - widely share our knowledge about park resources in order to enhance the public's ability to learn from, and to enjoy its national parks, and inspire a greater public pride in the national parks. Learning Centers will be created in each network for educating the public (GPRA long term strategic goal Ib1).

2. Protecting Native Species and their Habitat

Nonnative Species - species that threaten native plant and animal biodiversity are to be identified, mapped and evaluated for effective management (GPRA long term strategic goal Ib1b).

Native & Endangered Species - parks serve as refuges and as relatively undisturbed baselines for assessing relative conditions of declining species. NPS must protect and restore these species (GPRA long term strategic goal Ia2).

3. Providing Leadership for a Healthy Environment

Environmental Stewardship - NPS will comply with all environmental laws and apply the highest standards of environmental stewardship (GPRA long term strategic goal IVa9).

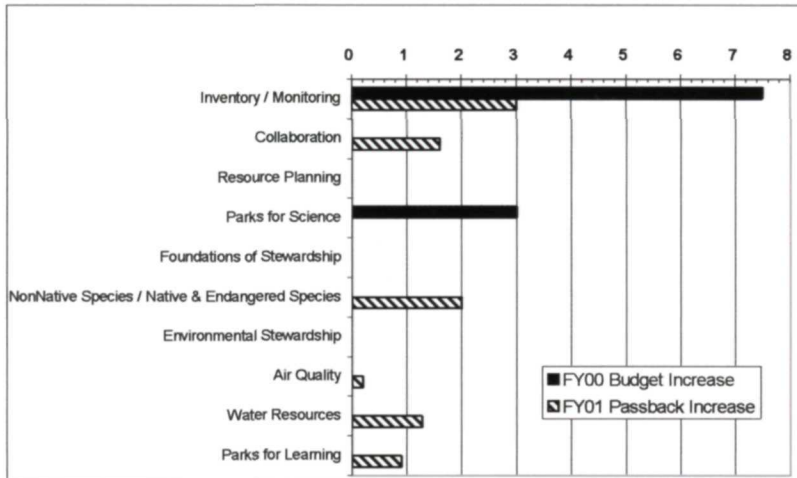
Air Quality - expand air quality monitoring network and associated activities to provide improved geographical representation. Identify air pollution sources within parks and help parks reduce their own emissions (GPRA long term strategic goal Ia3).

Water Resources - implement scientific water quality monitoring stations and protect natural flows and the health of aquatic ecosystems (GPRA long term strategic goal Ia4 and Ib5).

Foundations of Stewardship - to meet all of other NRC Challenges and Strategies, NPS requires a fully-professional staff with the skills to identify resource issues; obtain, interpret, and apply scientific information; and to solve highly technical and complex policy problems on the ground (GPRA long term strategic goal IVa).

What are Increases to the FY00 and FY01 Budgets?

Expected Increases to Servicewide FY00 & FY01 Budgets (in \$Millions)



How is Alaska Meeting the Natural Resource Challenge?

The Alaska Region is already implementing several NRC Strategies:

Inventory: The Biological Resources Inventory program began in October, 1999. FY2000 monies are being used to identify available information for each network, hold network scoping sessions, and develop inventory study plans and habitat stratification maps.

Ecoregion Mapping - NPS led the Interagency Ecomapping Team for Alaska in producing a common *Ecological Regions of Alaska* map to be published in summer 2000. This effort is now receiving Inventory funding and the results will be used for habitat stratification mapping.

Water Resources Inventories: FY2000 funding has been approved for developing a water resource inventory plan for Alaska. This plan is being developed in coordination with the Biological inventories with the intent of integrating the biotic and abiotic components.

Monitoring: The Central Alaska Network is expected to receive FY2001 funding. Regionwide coordinated efforts to identify vital signs and monitoring issues will begin in FY2000.

Resource Planning: Alaska Region is revising its long range Natural Resources Strategic Plan, incorporating action items for improving resource protection and management, and meeting NRC and GPRA goals.

Parks For Learning: DENA and KEFJ have submitted Learning Center proposals for funding. Alaska Region has also been developing multimedia interpretive products, currently highlighting BELA and WRST.



What Needs to be Done:

- Develop a regionwide strategy
- Assign a coordinator
- Identify priority strategic actions that do not require funding and implement them