

# WASO SOCIAL SCIENCE PROGRAM

3/15/91 #39

## SOCIAL CONFLICTS

**Officials worried by crowding  
on Mississippi, St. Croix**

*Rhetoric Easier Than Action on Environment*

**Developer, preservationists  
seek peace**

*Lake Clark flap  
pits park officials  
against residents*

**Yellowstone's Rising Tourism Sets Off Debate**

*Trampling the natural ecology*

**Tons of trampling tourists**



# United States Department of the Interior



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20013-7127

IN REPLY REFER TO:

March 17, 1991

Memorandum

To: Park Superintendents

From: Assistant to the Director for Science and Technology

Subject: **SOCIAL CONFLICTS IN PARKS**

Social science deals with interactions amongst individuals and groups, frequently involving people with different cultures, customs, values, beliefs, behavior patterns, etc. These differences often lead to conflicts that Superintendents must resolve.

Dr. Frank Noe, Regional Sociologist for the SER, together with Dr. William Little, Advantage Research, has written a short paper that addresses three aspects of PARK-RELATED SOCIAL CONFLICT ISSUES. First, this paper establishes a framework within which social conflicts in parks can be categorized according to (a) the party that initiates the conflict and (b) the party that is impacted by the conflict. This is useful in a problem definition sense in that it helps to identify the principal participants in park-related social conflict situations and the dominant roles of those participants. The framework adopted by Dr. Noe considers three categories of SOCIAL CONFLICT INITIATORS (visitors; parks; and communities) and three categories of PARTIES WHO BEAR THE IMPACTS OF THE CONFLICT (visitors; parks; and communities). . . i.e., a nine-cell matrix:

CONFLICT INITIATOR	PARTY IMPACTED BY THE CONFLICT		
	VISITOR	PARK	COMMUNITY
VISITOR	1	2	3
PARK	4	5	6
COMMUNITY	7	8	9

The kinds of social conflicts falling in each cell of the matrix are discussed in the paper. For example, in cell #4: a park manager (the INITIATOR) sets aside a restricted area for preservation purposes; some visitors (the IMPACTED) do not share the Superintendent's commitment to preservation, and resist the restriction on their use of the protected resource.

Second, Dr. Noe's paper identifies a number of widespread fallacies, or faulty assumptions, that people accept about social conflict problems. For example, people frequently, but incorrectly, believe that:

. . . there is general agreement or consensus regarding social problems (while in reality, it often is a lack of consensus on social issues, and what needs to be done about them, that is a root cause of the social problem);

. . . social problems are caused by unusual, abnormal, or "bad" people; or

. . . "getting the facts" will solve the problem.

The paper emphasizes the need to be aware of such fallacies when participating in conflict resolution activities.

Third, the paper discusses the importance of recognizing that different visitor social groups (birdwatchers, hikers, snowmobilers, etc.) and different visitor social subcultures (Anglos, Hispanics, etc.) think and act differently, perceive situations very differently, have different values regarding resources, respond to park management and law enforcement authority figures in different ways, have different norms, and find different kinds of social behavior both acceptable and desirable. Recognizing and understanding these fundamental social group and social subculture differences can help to explain:

. . . why different social groups either do or do not come to parks;

. . . why different groups have different preservation and environmental ethics;

. . . why different groups behave as they do in parks, sometimes in ways that park management finds unacceptable, but that seem perfectly normal to a visitor group;

. . . why different groups respond to management actions and policies in different ways, and either accept or reject management's basic right to impose those actions and policies; and

. . . why different groups have different expectations and use different criteria to measure the satisfaction level of their park visit or park experience.

The authors discuss the relevance of such factors. Further, they observe that social conflicts in parks are problems that lie not with visitors, or with the park, or with the community, but rather with interactions among these groups. And finally, the authors suggest that sensitivity to the underlying social differences exhibited by different subcultures and social groups can be helpful in resolving social conflict

situations . . . not from the standpoint that standards, policies or time-proven NPS management practices are to be compromised in any way, but rather in the sense of avoiding unnecessary controversies likely to arise from misunderstandings of group and subculture social behavior characteristics and values.

Those who are interested in reviewing this paper can request a copy from Dr. Noe at the SERO, FTS 841-4916. "The Incidence of Conflicts in National Parks with Special Emphasis on the Southeast Region: A Content Analysis," by F. P. Noe and W. D. Little.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dick Briceland". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font. A long, thin diagonal stroke extends from the bottom of the signature downwards and to the left.

Richard H. Briceland