WASO SOCIAL SCIENCE PROGRAM

12/20/91 #59

RESOURCE MGMT. APPLICATIONS

Developer, preservationists seek peace

Parks Reaching a New Age

Wilderness-area group limits urged

Rhetoric Easier Than Action on Environment

Tempers rising as park studies expansion needs

The Changing Climate of Environmental Opinion

Battle Involving U.S. Parks Pits Beauty Against Growth

People, deer do not make the friendliest of neighbors

Forces of man, nature clash in question of Everglades protection

Recreation vs. conservation

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

TAKE PRIDE IN AMERICA

IN REPLY REFER TO:

December 20, 1991

Memorandum

To: Park Superintendents

From: Assistant to the Director for Science and Technology

Subject: **APPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE IN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT**

The process of providing a quality park experience involves building visitor awareness and appreciation of a park's resources, while simultaneously conveying to visitors an understanding of the fragile nature of those resources. Through this process, one creates a sense of personal involvement and ownership, resulting in a pattern of behavior that supports a strong resource protection ethic. In other words, providing a quality park experience involves an essential linkage or coupling between people management and resources management.

It often is said that our dual missions of preserving resources unimpaired versus providing for the public use and enjoyment of the national parks are mutually incompatible. Perhaps part of the reason for this presumed sense of incompatibility is that we as an organization have devoted so little effort to trying to understand the fundamental linkages and interdependencies between resource management and people management. It is here that social science has a unique role to play.
The discipline of social science enables us to better understand interactions between people and resources, and it is through social science research that we can learn about the resource-related attitudes, perceptions, values, interests, needs and preferences of both park visitors and the public at large.

Over the past two years, this Superintendents Memorandum Series has dealt primarily with recreation-related socio-economic matters such as: the economic impacts of parks; overcrowding and social carrying capacity; the elderly, minorities and other special visitor populations; individual and community benefits of parks; visitor demographics and trends; public use reporting; travel and tourism statistics; techniques for conducting visitor surveys; etc. During this two-year period, I have dealt only in a peripheral sense with the application of social science to resource management issues. The principal reason for this was that I had anticipated that the natural and the cultural resources offices independently would begin to fill that void. However, that has not happened as yet, perhaps in part because the importance of studying interactions between people and park resources either is not well-recognized or, alternatively, is perceived to be of lesser priority than other needs. In any event, I feel it would be worthwhile at this point at least to identify some of the areas where there is an interaction at the park level between people management issues vs resource management issues. My rationale here is that Superintendents who find these areas of inquiry to be relevant to operational or planning decision processes may wish to examine pertinent people-versus-resources questions in the course of their visitor survey activities. As you look through the following representative list of items involving both resources and people, you can judge for yourself whether these matters are relevant to management or planning issues facing your park.

Topics of possible interest that involve interactions between resources management and people management and that may be candidates for social science research:

Ecosystem management. Visitor perceptions of ecosystem concepts, and public recognition of the need to implement ecosystem management practices in order to accomplish habitat and wildlife preservation objectives.

Environmental role. Visitor and public perceptions about the proper role of NPS interpreters and other personnel as advocates of pollution control programs designed to respond to resource-threatening national environmental concerns such as acid rain, global warming, air and water pollution, hazardous waste management, etc.

External involvements. Public attitudes toward NPS efforts to influence zoning and other land-use decisions involving lands outside park boundaries . . . for example, in situations where it is perceived by the park that external lands constitute an essential part of a park-centered ecosystem, or in situations where inappropriate development or other use of external lands can be expected to adversely impact the visitor experience in some significant way.

Law enforcement. Visitor reactions to park law enforcement activities that support protection of natural and cultural resources.

Carrying capacity. Public understanding of ecological carrying capacity concepts, and public perceptions about the possible need to restrict visitor access in order to protect park resources.

Cultural differences. Developing a better understanding of differing attitudes, land-use ethics and behavior norms exhibited by ethnic and minority populations and by rural vs urban populations toward use and preservation of park resources.

Public use. Collecting baseline information about public participation in park-based natural or cultural resource activities, with data organized according to key socio-demographic variables such as age, sex, income, education, home zip code, family size, etc.

Land acquisition. Public attitudes toward NPS acquisition of historic sites, critical habitat or other resources that are located outside park boundaries and that could involve condemnation or confiscation of privately-owned assets.

Economic trade-offs. Public perceptions as to whether national park areas should be maintained inviolate and whether environmentally fragile areas inside and outside parks should be given special protection, even if this policy would result in reduced commercial and industrial development in the local area.

Marketing initiatives. Public reaction to NPS-sponsored marketing initiatives designed to stimulate increased use of park natural and cultural resources.

Endangered species. Public response to NPS support for threatened and endangered species management programs, both within and external to park lands.

Multiple use. Public awareness and understanding of fundamental differences between multiple-use policies versus preservation-mandated management objectives.

Wildlife control. Public attitudes about NPS efforts to eradicate and control exotic, feral or non-native species within parks, even if that means shooting, poisoning or similar actions to destroy animals.

Education initiatives. Public response to NPS information and educational programs, including public reaction to special initiatives that encourage the use of parks to teach urban minority and disadvantaged youth populations about natural processes and historic events.

For future generations. Public attitudes about the timelessness of the NPS mandate to preserve park resources and attributes unimpaired for future generations, as versus taking actions designed to facilitate current use and enjoyment, even when that may mean some sacrifice of resource integrity.

Predator species. Public understanding of the role of predators in maintaining a healthy and diverse natural resource base, and public attitudes toward programs designed to reintroduce extinct predator populations in the national parks, even if that might be perceived by some to pose a potential future threat to domestic animal populations.

Resource extraction. Public attitudes toward mining, forestry, geothermal wells, oil and gas drilling, commercial fishing, hunting and other resource extraction activities not only on NPS lands but also on those lands adjacent to parks where the resource extraction activity likely would compromise the integrity of the park or adversely influence the visitor experience.

Management priorities. Public perceptions of proper management priorities and allocation of monies related to the use, development and preservation of resources in and around national parks.

User fees. Public reactions to fees and fee levels associated with the use and enjoyment of park natural and cultural resources.

Public sensitivities. Develop a better understanding of the extent to which visitors and the general public are persuaded by emotion-driven campaigns to support actions to protect heroic wildlife species or famous landmarks, and how these public concerns can be channeled so as to support broad resource protection and preservation objectives of the parks.

Final Comments. The foregoing indicates a number of topical areas where people interests and resource management interests interact, sometimes in ways that cause significant controversies and/or management problems. Unfortunately, we currently do not have good scientific information about many of these matters. I would hope, therefore, that when Superintendents have the opportunity to sponsor visitor surveys or public perception surveys that you will address some of these people management vs resources management issues as they apply to your park. I think that collectively we will be surprised at how useful these data will be in such diverse applications as planning, structuring educational programs, building constituent support, helping to assess the effectiveness of enforcement actions, designing interpretive messages for targeted populations, and helping to resolve conflicts involving land-use activities outside park boundaries.

Richard H. Briceland