

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARKS SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20240

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Memorandum

To: Washington Office and All Field Offices

From: Assistant Director, Operations

Subject: Water resources management

The Service has long been in need of more comprehensive and effective management of its water resources. Progress has been limited, however, partly because of the lack of specific instructions and established procedures to be applied at the park level giving purpose and direction to water resources management. Cases have come up in recent months further accenting the urgency of positive steps toward more effective and efficient management of park water resources.

Instructions and guidelines useful in the preparation of park water resources management plans will be completed in handbook form and distributed as soon as possible. In the meantime, however, this memorandum summarizes the more important instructions and guidelines to appear in the handbook and identifies action programs and procedures which can be initiated immediately. We do this to encourage Superintendents of those areas of the National Park System where water resources management is applicable to start now with activities, such as the mapping and field studies of water resources, before unfavorable winter weather in some parks forces their suspension for another year.

After defining and comparing the two basic doctrines (riparian and appropriative) incorporated into the water laws of various states, the handbook will identify and discuss action programs and procedures which can be applied at the park level. These include: (1) water resources inventory and evaluation; (2) state water law study; (3) determination of the status of park and alien water rights; (4) a

review of provisions in park contractual documents, such as special-use permits and concession contracts dealing with water matters; (5) special surveys and investigations essential in obtaining water rights by appropriation and purchase; (6) the assembly and updating of water docket; (7) the inclusion of adequate information on water resources and water rights in master plans; (8) the application of the principle of beneficial use to water resources management; and (9) a listing of other things which can be done to achieve water resources conservation objectives.

Most of these action programs and procedures are self-explanatory, but a few require amplification. For example, while the inventory and evaluation of water resources is primarily the job of trained specialists, Park and District Rangers and others are often the only persons in a position to make constant or periodic observations on water resources, and to keep up to date on water resources developments in surrounding areas. Specialists must usually rely on parks for information, such as the flow behavior, rates of yield, utilization, and quality of water from sources including seeps, springs, and wells.

Examples are legion in which the conservation of water can be achieved. Thrift in domestic uses can be encouraged, and waste be prevented through the repair of leaks in storage and distribution systems. Water yield can sometimes be increased by the removal of trash and the accumulation of exotic vegetation within and near water sources. Observations will also often disclose remedial measures required in situations where facilities, such as pit toilets and garbage disposal trenches have been improperly located resulting in water pollution.

The information on the history of some water sources should be gathered with emphasis on past commitments to the use of water and the clarification of rights which have not yet been fully adjudicated. Vexing problems always arise where titles to water rights are cloudy; and the accumulation of background information on past commitments and uses is the only way these situations can eventually be resolved.

Superintendents thus have a great amount of leeway in action programs and procedures, which can be pursued without jeopardizing existing rights or the possibilities of acquiring additional rights. Risks accrue chiefly through making premature commitments on behalf of the Government without sufficient background information and professional guidance. Within these general limits, we urge Superintendents to

proceed with the preparation of park water resources management plans and with doing the many other things which can lead to more efficient and effective management of park water resources as a whole.

This memorandum will remain in effect until the handbook material on water resources management is distributed and be useful as a summary statement thereafter.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Howard W. Baker". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the page.