



National Park Service - Department of the Interior  
Fort Collins - Denver - Washington

## Fact Sheet

# U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service Natural Resource Information Division



## National Water Quality Assessment Program in National Parks

October 1996

The National Park Service (NPS) has been soliciting the assistance of the National Water-Quality Assessment (NAWQA) Program of the U.S. Geological Survey to address a multitude of serious water issues in national parks. As a result, a pilot NPS-NAWQA Program has been conducted in some parks. The objectives of NPS in forming a partnership with the NAWQA Program are (1) the establishment of a cooperative partnership with a national, institutionalized water-quality program; (2) an influence on monitoring to ensure that the needs of parks for specific information on water issues are met; (3) the confirmation that the collaboration between the two agencies is efficient and cost-effective in meeting the water-quality monitoring responsibilities of both agencies; and (4) an indication of the effectiveness of full implementation of the program in parks nationwide. The partnership is particularly desirable not only because it is a collaboration between sister agencies but because it directly supports the Inventory and Monitoring Program of NPS.

### Background

NAWQA is a long-term program of the U.S. Geological Service that integrates intensive monitoring with more limited follow-up studies in selected large watersheds throughout the United States. The studies provide consistent and scientifically sound information for managing water resources. The greater objectives for the NAWQA Program are the assessment of the status and trends in the quality of the nation's groundwater

and surface water and the improvement of an understanding of the primary natural and human influences on water quality. NPS identified parks in the NAWQA study units<sup>1</sup>, elicited the participation of park personnel in NAWQA meetings, and encouraged priority selection of study locations in parks with major water-quality issues.



In 1994, NPS and the U.S. Geological Survey began collaboration to increase NAWQA work in parks. The focus has been on monitoring that is of high interest to NPS but would otherwise not have been included in the study design of the NAWQA Program. The two agencies signed a formal memorandum of understanding to coordinate the integration of national parks into the NAWQA Program. In 1995, a pilot NPS-NAWQA monitoring program was

<sup>1</sup>A study unit is a major hydrologic system under study and is geographically defined by a combination of groundwater and surface-water features and usually encompasses more than 10,000 square kilometers.

initiated to foster this partnership. The technical expertise, national protocols, laboratory and field quality control, and data management and analysis capabilities of the U.S. Geological Survey have been used to produce information that can be applied in management of water resources in parks.

### Program Status

During 1995 and 1996, each agency spent about \$200,000 per year on monitoring park-specific water resources in 10 study units of the NAWQA Program and in 12 parks. Collaborative water-quality monitoring, including biological assessments, were conducted in Grand Teton National Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, Yosemite National Park, Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, Curecanti National Recreation Area, Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Ozark National Scenic Riverways, Saint Croix National Scenic Riverway, Buffalo National River, Bandelier National Monument, Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Monument, and Congaree Swamp National Monument. NPS funds for most of the monitoring in the pilot program were transferred to the U.S. Geological Survey by an interagency agreement. All data are available to NPS in national databases, and reports by the survey that include data from parks will soon be available. The Water Resources Division intends to continue supporting the NAWQA Program in national parks during fiscal year 1997 and has targeted funds for that purpose. However, further collaborations

with the NAWQA Program depend on future budgets.

#### **Potential Program Change**

Funding that would expand the pilot collaborative NPS-NAWQA Program has been proposed. If funded, possibly in 1998, an expanded NAWQA Program in national parks will include long-term water-resources monitoring in as many as 70 parks. NPS funding will augment current cost-sharing with the U.S. Geological Survey to implement intensive and low-level monitoring in parks that are in NAWQA study units on a cyclical, rotational basis. About one third of the parks will be intensively monitored at a time.

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