

The Politics of Community Resource Management

Robert L. Arnberger

Because we manage parks, we share a common bond from the start. After all—we represent the "thin green line" that protects our nation's heritage—or do we?

There are big philosophical differences among many park managers and leaders within our organization. You know it; I know it—there is not a philosophical agreement amongst us as to how we should manage our parks in the face of growing adversity and external threat.

My own allegiance lies with more than the individual park unit I help to manage. My allegiance lies with a National Park *System*, not a single unit of a system. My loyalty is pledged to a concept I that I consider to be one of the few "pure and virgin" concepts ever put to action....the preservation of a nation's natural and cultural values by a *system* of parks.

As a manager of parks within this system, I feel I must *assertively* exercise my management responsibilities for in *not* doing so I, in effect, am mismanaging. Throughout my "managing around in the park system," I have found myself involved in the dynamic and often dramatic arena of community politics—and I like it.

Why is it some managers must be *convinced* to enter an arena of community politics, when that decision is a logical progression and extension of their vested responsibilities? To some park managers their interpretation of responsibility must extend to careers first, parks second, and system last; to standards of performance that are measured against technical criteria such as personnel management guidelines, forms management, and reports guidelines. They have no sense of strategic management principles where an "intuitive feel" for a philosophy of protecting a nation's values becomes the beacon for carrying out the "grand idea."

There is a reality now that must be faced. It is a reality that holds the potential for ruin as well as solution. The threats our parks face are the threats that our nation and society face. Urban America has closed in on the park system. The parks do not exist in "splendid isolation" as many of them once did. Increasing population exercises a steady quest for energy, transportation, food, recreation, and living space. The by-

products of these society requirements do not limit themselves to artificial legislative boundaries. Indeed, we know that they do not limit themselves to single communities, regions, states, or even nations. The poisoning of our planet may be the single, *final* common denominator of the equation. The information gap between what we know of these effects upon parks and the increasing quantity of new threats that daily show their face makes one wonder if solution will ever be part of any equation.

To further complicate the picture, the National Park Service, which has been entrusted with the responsibility of managing the system, is subject to wide swings of philosophy and management practice with each change of political administration. This reality creates frustration; at its worst it can destroy the principles of park management evolved from over a century of practice and potentially destroy the resource. If change is needed, let it come in small increments where we can assess constantly the effects upon the resource. As ex-Secretary of Interior Andress once said, "If we are to err, let us err in favor of the resource."

The need is for park managers to view their jobs in a broader context. Threats to parks are, by-in-large, externally generated by communities, by industries, and by political alliances or policies. A new era of park management lies before us. New sets of rules and policies will be written by park managers who perceive accurately that philosophy, protection, and solution must be accomplished with and through others outside the park. The concept of *community investment* in the protection of a resource must be a sought for end. In my view there is adequate justification and rationale to extend into these arenas more assertively than is presently the case. What is required is the decision, the inner conviction, the modulated and strategical implementation, and most importantly the strength to withstand assault. Even within our own organization, taking a position of advocacy for resource protection can be a lonely stance, more often than it should be.

Taking an advocacy posture can be supported by first focusing on authorizing legislation and accompanying intent of Congress. Broaden your review of legislation and find precedent—beginning with the Organic Act of 1916 and succeeding systemwide acts of the Congress.

Then check the legislative history of your own park. It must be inspected, dissected, and continually resurrected. If a vacuum exists, find the justification or precedent elsewhere. In our arguments with outside interests on external threats, we must methodically present our case based upon legal footing. Once this footing is established it is possible to extend to more conceptual, philosophical, and emotional arguments. Managers also must evaluate the legislation and congressional intent in terms of the *legal requirements placed upon them* in assertively acting to protect the resources they manage. In fact, it can be argued that by *not* aggressively managing the effect of external threats, a manager is in violation of the law he is pledged to carry out. It can be argued that certain compromises, negotiations, or lack of action place you in full risk of breaking the law. The Redwoods Act clearly states that failure to act, or making a decision detrimentally affecting the resource constitutes a "derogation of the values and purposes for which these various areas have been established." In short, the days of the simple "Custodial Superintendency" have ended. The threats are too varied and the risks too great.

These "Custodial Superintendents" are technical managers who adhere to management principles that constitute too narrow an image of their responsibilities. They view their job as simply implementing programs provided through clear legislative mandate by means of ordinary administrative systems and controls. "Receive the tasks and perform as directed," becomes both a codeword and excuse. Measurable products provided by monitoring systems, internal controls, rules, procedures, and internal regulations are created to assure strict conformance to the implementation mandate. These "conformance systems" provide useful management and organizational tools for analyzing, directing, and controlling our jobs of managing park resources. But, this approach fails to call forth the traits now required by park managers.

Superintendents must become "Strategic Managers," where the task must be more broadly defined if it is to truly encompass what is being asked. Few park managers are given the luxury of well-defined instructions about the shape, extent, and characteristics of the programs for which they are responsible. In his essay on "Strategic Management in the Public Sector," Professor Herman Leonard of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, states that:

Public officials are given resources with which to advance stated but often vague public purposes, through programs whose outlines are rarely more than sketched. They work with—and within—a mandate that is vague, contested, and shifting. They must imagine an appropriate conception of each program, one that is consistent with the legislated mandate and that can attract the requisite public and legislative support. They must give shape to the broad outlines of the program, making the vague mandate operational and reformulating it into more concrete tasks and goals. They must ask themselves the hard questions about the ultimate consequences and value and costs of the programs they pursue. They must be aware of political support for and opposition to their programs, and must find ways to position programs as to be responsive to changing political demands. They must work creatively to produce and take advantage of new opportunities to improve their programs, and explain the need for these changes to their political overseers. Indeed, often, they must be active in building support for their programs or for reformulations they have developed. They must, in short, build and act upon a strategic conception of their programs within the wider political sphere.

Park managers must be an important part of the process of policy formulation and redesign. They must develop the capacity to understand what creates public value. Seeking and exploiting new opportunities for providing services, responding to changes in political demands in innovative ways and acting to build a mandate for changes they believe are in the public interest must be the cornerstone for superintendency action. The job requires substantial discretion. It demands a political consciousness. It insists upon decision making and risk taking. The future of the National Park System depends upon the conviction and commitment of the strategic manager who views political and community interaction as a necessity in carrying out his job.

A further affirmation must be made. Just as the perception of "how to manage" must change, so too must the definition of NPS resource management if we are to carry out the politics of *community* resource management. *All* employees in the NPS work towards perpetuation of the resource and our one common bond in the broadest sense is that we are *all* resource managers. This concept is easy for me to understand but its interpretation is as varied as the number of managers who apply it. The core of this affirmation simply states that our only mission in the National Park Service is to manage the resource.

In light of the increasing number and severity of external threats and the reality that many of our ecosystems are not purely "natural" anymore, I believe that a new era of "Conservation Biology" is at hand. Michael Soulé in an essay published in *BioScience* (Vol. 35, No. 11) in December 1985, examines this new discipline. I feel it has particular merit in terms of the politics of community resource management. Professor Soulé describes "Conservation Biology" as a science that "addresses the biology of species, communities, and ecosystems that are perturbed, either directly or indirectly, by human activities or other agents. Its goal is to provide principles and tools for preserving biological diversity." Professor Soulé states that it is a "crisis discipline...where one must act before knowing all the facts." Action is predicated upon a mixture of science and art, intuition and information, facts and philosophy. The real world now requires strategic resource managers to make decisions, offer comments and recommendations, and take action on external threat situations before the manager may be completely comfortable with the theoretical and empirical bases of the analysis. Tolerating uncertainty is frequently uncomfortable but often necessary.

For political reasons, decisions on managing the resource must often be made in haste. Community political interests demand proof of negative impacts upon the resource. Industries require review and demand quantitative analysis. Individuals leverage park impacts for personal or neighborhood association gain. The realities of chemical pollution effects, introduction of exotic species, definitions of minimum conditions for viable populations, the kinds of management practices undertaken and the ecological effects of development can be a confusing and uncoordinated orchestra of clamoring, contradicting demands to **make a decision now**.

We must pursue a conservation biology objective of "protection and continuity of entire communities and exosystems" (Soulé). Strategic practitioners of conservation biology "attach less weight to aesthetics, maximum yields, and profitability, and more to the long-range viability of whole systems and species, including their evolutionary potential" (Soulé). For the foreseeable future, park service managers cannot pursue a passive role of assuming long-term viability of natural communities will be guaranteed with little or no help from humans. In fact, we must become "managers" of

systems to assure long-term viability. We must make *conservation* oriented decisions based upon the best information available and with strategic and political sense to them. Many of our actions must, of necessity, be reactive. Inconclusive science or long-term research with little product can not be afforded. Science must be built around a concept of giving the manager answers that, while not precise or definite, will allow the manager to quickly enter the decision role required by the community.

When the park manager enters the decision role, success will largely depend on the manager's ability to:

- establish clear objectives
- anticipate potential impacts
- find help to support park interests
- understand the planning and regulatory process
- make some compromises consistent with park purposes
- follow through on promises

The mechanics of problem identification, solution, and community involvement are as varied as the number of parks, managers, and situations. Realizing this, I hope to weave for you a fabric of insights I have gleaned from the following sources:

1. Essay by Roland Wauer on "The Role of the National Park Service Natural Resource Manager," February 1980.
2. Essay and presentation by Rick Smith on "Some Non-Ecological Principles," December 1981, later printed in *Park Science*, Winter 1984.
3. Draft Report on "Park Protection" by WASO, based upon interviews with superintendents and members of their staff in 15 parks heavily affected by development pressures on adjacent lands, March 1987.
4. Essays and presentations on "The Politics of Resource Management at Saguaro National Monument," by Robert Arnberger, April 1986.

This fabric is heavily textured by my own feelings and experiences. It does not reflect the only way to do something. You may take issue with my perceptions. Your reactions are every bit as valid as mine and these other authors.

Proposition I

Have a clear understanding of what the *real* issue is and what the National Park Service position is. A superficial under-

standing of the issue is quickly perceived and the credibility of data or founding philosophy can be irretrievably impaired.

Some corollaries to consider:

1. Recognize that a legislative and administrative history of a park is based upon a series of promises, deals, trade-offs, and compromises required to garner support for the project. Don't make a fatal mistake of ignoring them but examine them in a positive light relative to the *opportunities* they offer.

2. The National Park Service should present its own interests and desires independently and avoid joining "coalitions." It seems to me too easy to have a coalition, rather than the Superintendent, dictating what is best for the park unit. As well, a coalition can miss the primary issue with secondary special interest issues that end up confusing and confounding those that must resolve the issue. A handicap you may experience by not "joining the party" is the tag of "fence sitter." Combat this perception aggressively by repeatedly speaking to NPS interests and stressing the need for independence of your action. Alliances are different from coalitions and are a necessary fact of life. Realize that the ally you have today may be your adversary tomorrow. Seek alliances that have "strength" to them and are based upon philosophical and practical similarities. The weakest alliances are exclusively issue specific where similarity of philosophy or mission is coincidental. Beware of the "wolf in lamb's clothing" who wishes to seek an alliance for other purposes.

3. Avoid confusing friends *and* foe. Exercise well-thought-out "battlefield tactics" but don't let those maneuvers confuse those who hold the key to solution. When the question is asked, "I wonder what side he is on now?" answer it aggressively and consistently with, "the resource's side." Frequently, issues get clouded by the variety and number of community groups involved. Separate out the NPS issue and deal in a clear-cut manner with those issues that impact the resource *you* manage. Dealing with other issues can weaken your position.

Proposition II

A community must possess a sense of investment in the positive solution of problems. Park problems are community problems and solutions must be perceived as having their origins in the community rather than within the park.

Several corollaries to consider:

1. The "people" process is different from the "political" process. Developing a sense of investment in these two groups may bring you to the same final product but is usually a result of different processes. A politician's sense of "investment" may be edged with hard realities and compromises. The "people's" sense of investment may be one of emotion and philosophy lacking a great deal of practicality.

2. Special interest groups will assent to investment or agreement *only* when they are convinced that their *own* interests are being served. Philosophical arguments will generally be futile. Concentrate on determining what *they* will gain rather than what the park will gain.

3. Market your park as an integral and vital member of the community. Know the demographics of your visitation and the economics that your presence in the community represents. Speak to how the park contributes to local employment, citizen enjoyment, emergency services, visitor dollars, and "national image" for the community. Build a constituency actively and purposefully.

Proposition III

Know the game players and be well versed in the rules by which *they* must play, for those are the rules you must play by also. You must get involved early and watch and listen carefully as the issue begins to develop. Chart not only your progress in the issue, but the progress of others as well. Knowing what was said in preliminary meetings and knowing of the dynamics of the participants may directly influence the outcome.

Several corollaries to consider:

1. The administrative and legal process by which a community plans and leads itself will be more important for you to learn than the similar process in your own agency. Read the comprehensive plans, the zoning ordinances, transportation plans, and neighborhood plans. Know what the planners' positions are, know what the politicians feel, and know what the special interest groups want. Knowledge of the process and personalities is the best tool for predicting behavior.

2. Don't be accused of "not coordinating" and don't be a stranger to the key agency orchestrating the process. Pursue "official coordination" responsibilities but don't forget the regular informal visit to discuss a mutual issue or find out more about an issue. Remember the reality of coordination—once you start, be sure you *fairly* involve yourself in the full spectrum of the issue—both friend and foe.

3. Recognize that other points of view may be valid and try to understand the interests of other participants. While being concerned about impacts on parks, don't fail to recognize that the parks sometimes produce negative impacts on landowners adjacent to the parks. Respect other's interests—even if we may not agree with them. Be "up front" in your disagreement and realize that "too much bobbing and weaving can lose you the prize fight."

Proposition IV

It is possible to make decisions based upon philosophical considerations and they will be accepted if you are honest about it. However, there is no substitute for accurate science

data to combine with the philosophical considerations. Decisions are based upon a variety of facts and information and should not be subject to exclusive subservience to scientific data or required research. You won't often get away with a philosophical or emotional decision, so be sure you take your best shot. Ultimately the data will be asked for or required anyway.

Several corollaries to consider:

1. "Crying wolf" will work twice—not three times. Even your friends will desert you when you present arguments that have little substance. Find substance and strength in your claims through facts, data, more facts, and more data. If you are making a decision based upon few facts, then say so. Creation of data and presentation of irrelevant facts is quickly seen.

2. Be prepared to be challenged with every decision. Before making the decision institute a process of evaluating what the challenges might be and where they will come from.

3. When you deal with specific impacts upon a specific resource, your arguments will be more persuasive than appeals to the general principles of conservation.

4. Be prepared to have the rug completely pulled out from under you. Develop fall-back positions and be prepared to negotiate. Distinguish between what is *really* essential to protect the park and what is just desirable. Know how to conduct an effective damage control mission and be able to distinguish when you have done enough. Too much damage control purveys a sense of weakness and lack of planning.

Proposition V

The solution to a problem is not necessarily dependent on NPS assuming the leadership role. Plan your strategy in an issue to determine levels of involvement and what opportunities exist to deliberately avoid or engage involvement.

Some corollaries to consider:

1. Sometimes "your" statement can be more effectively said by someone else. Realize that others can be leaders as well and may carry the banner more ably than you. Don't avoid behind the scenes maneuvering and action in order to ensure that resource interests are protected. Realize that a variety of avenues can lead to a common goal.

2. The political and special interest friends of the park must be alerted and prepared to play a part in the solution of highly charged political issues. Park managers must be able to recognize that time when they can do no more. Third party interests must be similarly astute in recognizing this impasse and be prepared to exercise the opportunities available to them.

3. Beware of the "Joan of Arc" complex. Although a commander of an army, she was burned at the stake. Our own egos often lead us to roles we should not accept. Coalitions looking for either leaders or scapegoats constantly search for that "magnetic issue and personality." Remember that generals manage a war or battle from the war rooms at the rear of the front. Battles are usually won by a variety of field commanders who follow a strategy developed by the general.

4. Be persistent and patient. Some of the success stories are the result of efforts by park managers who have pursued their objective against heavy odds. The time and energy invested in endless meetings may not produce immediate results, but it builds credibility and may lead to a key decision that will protect the park. Remember, there are a lot of friends out there—your job is to make touch with them.

5. Remember, you aren't the only one planning involvement or action strategies. Just as you incorporate others into your agenda without their knowledge, so they are doing the same with you. As you manipulate the process and the personalities within the process, realize you are probably being manipulated by others. Be prepared to react when someone else's agenda maneuvers you into a position where you don't wish to be. Similarly, be prepared to react and seize the opportunity when someone else's agenda has maneuvered you to "where you want to be."

Each park manager will find his or her own niche in the politics of their community resource management program. As well, each manager will develop a personal style and form in dealing with the community. I simply contend that your entrance into the community must be a conscious decision. It begins with a personal philosophical orientation to *take* action rather than have it forced upon you. It recognizes that remedy is intimately linked to community politics. It requires a park manager to be more than a "Custodial Superintendent." It involves accepting a strategic management role that allows maneuvering in fluid and value laden political environments where use of the variety of legislative, administrative, and policy remedies can be used more decisively to protect the resource.

As well, a new concept of conservation biology must evolve to better respond to the realities now being faced by our parks. It will allow the manager the flexibility of dealing with issues and making strategic decisions based on less than the ideal empirical evidence concentrating on systems and entire biological communities.

Ultimately philosophy, legislation, a new biology and strategical management is translated into mechanical field applications by the park superintendent.

[From a presentation given at the June 18, 1987 Superintendency Course at Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area]

Robert L. Arnberger, Assistant Superintendent, Everglades National Park, Florida.



Northern and Remote Parks: Development Management and Impacts

Chip Dennerlein

The theme of Northern and Remote Parks is one that excites the imagination and challenges the talents of both state and federal managers of park lands in Alaska. To put my relationship to this theme in perspective, I must introduce myself as the chief officer of a division of the Department of Natural Resources of the State of Alaska: The Alaska Division of Parks. That agency is charged with a general statewide responsibility for public recreation on all state lands in Alaska and is specifically responsible for the management of more than three million acres of state park lands, which have been withdrawn from the public domain as "special purpose sites" under the constitution of the State. I am not responsible for the nearly 100 million acres of park and refuge lands which have been set aside by various federal agencies. However, I spent the better part of two years traveling between Alaska and Washington, D.C., working on the legislation that set those areas aside.

"Northern and Remote Parks" are no strangers to State Park managers. Nearly three quarters of our system is comprised of large blocks of remote or semi-remote parklands. At 1.5 million acres, the Wood-Tikchik State Park comprises fully one half of our state system. It is one of the largest state parks in the world and no roads reach its boundaries. I would like to consider with you today the "Alaskan experience" in the management of our remote parks.

The impetus to set aside large tracts of remote park land in Alaska is probably not very different from the motivations that led Canadians to establish some of **your** great areas. Certainly, a desire to preserve a quality of wilderness that is