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Global Ethic: Fostering Parks in America¹

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The U. S. National Park System is in place. It represents one of America's outstanding historic achievements. It was 70 years in the making and has grown from 14 national parks and 21 national monuments in 1916 to 343 units in 1988 with an annual operating budget of one billion dollars.

The creation of each unit is an individual story of forward-looking people and groups who were on the cutting edge of the environmental movement of their time. Some did more than others, but they were all part of an era of creating parks in America and a park ethic that has been emulated around the world. We honor many of them when we tell their stories every day in every park in the National Park System.

As a result of their efforts, we are left with the task of stewarding and expanding on a system which includes a wide array of resources—historical, natural and recreational—which collectively are national treasures. Past park managers—decision makers—have dealt with many complex and ever changing issues over the years. They have followed policies, procedures and guidelines, as well as their own professional expertise. From the Lane Letter, with its management principles and twenty-three operational directives, to today's resource management policy, park managers have consistently made resource protection decisions based on known environmental principles. Unfortunately, the impact of increased urbanization and accelerated growth on park resources were not always easily predictable; no one could have anticipated the extent of development pressures of recent years and their long-range impacts on park resources. Nevertheless, resource management decisions over the years were generally made with the best information available.

In 1915, Stephen Mather was able to dynamite Great Northern's sawmill to remove an 'eyesore' and thereby protect a park resource. Today, however, such a 'quick fix' solution would generate more problems than it would solve.

Without a doubt, we need to better protect park resources from adverse influences within, as well as outside of, the boundary. On one

hand, a key to future park protection is to influence the growth management decisions being made by the communities which surround our national treasures; and on the other, it is equally important that we influence the national economic and environmental decisions.

Just as Mather took a bold step to protect Glacier National Park, today's park manager needs to emulate that decisiveness and effectiveness in a much more complex time. The promises and pitfalls of increased direct interaction with nearby communities and the influencing of national and regional growth policies are many. The effort may tax one's nervous system, strain financial and staff resources, and give rise to accusations of 'Federal interference.' On the other hand, it may put some vitality and excitement into an organization's blood that some feel has grown thin. Today's park managers need to expand their vision, knowledge and expertise over the boundary fence and become directly involved in the growth issues of nearby communities. We can better preserve our national treasures by taking a leadership role in protecting ecosystems, landscapes and waterways, whether or not we own them. When we protect the *region* from the adverse impacts of acid rain we protect our *parks*. When we help manage visitor impact on neighboring communities, we in fact manage visitor impacts within our parks.

First and foremost, the parks are an integral part of the national and international tourist industry, serving as destinations for hundreds of millions of people. This is not surprising given that tourism is the second or third most important industry for most of the states of the Union. In many cases, the parks serve an important role in local and regional economies.

Parks are part of the educational community. They are increasingly used for scholarly pursuits and illuminate the historical and scientific value and virtue of the parks and the nation. The scholarship associated with the parks is heavily dependent upon their protection, preservation and restoration, and *vice versa*. The research and education that go on in the parks and which are transferred to the public establish the parks as unique entities in the social, educational, political and economic community in which they are located. Their unique identity and the vital role they play in the nation and the community defines their social worth and justifies their ultimate protection. The parks will be safe only as part of an enlightened social, political, economic, and educational system.

An exciting prospect arises from the resolution to take a leadership role in protecting, and enhancing American parks: it is the wonderful opportunity to help make a park of America.

As we accept the mission of the National Park Service to protect, preserve and restore park values, educate visitors and non-visitors alike about park values and provide the highest quality visitor services, it is necessary that we actively participate in today's environmental decisionmaking.

To do this we must accept the need and take a leadership role at all levels of the Service in today's tourism, education and environmental

issues. The job of being "just a park manager" is big enough; however, in today's world it is necessary that we play a significant role in a more and more complex local, regional and, yes, even the global environment.

Some of the Specific Tasks Ahead Include the Need To:

- ◆ Set standards of excellence in resource protection, park management, uses of appropriate technology in solid waste disposal, energy conservation, collections management, historic vista management, and employment of state-of-the-art techniques in inventorying and monitoring resource systems both within park boundaries and those external which impact park values.
- ◆ Increase and systematize our capacity as an educational institution. Examples include: expanding both the depth and breadth of interpretive programs to reach a larger, more informed audience.
- ◆ Develop, articulate and accept the responsibility as a major participant in American tourism by knowing the value of parks to tourism so that the rest of that industry does what it needs to do to protect its own interest and park values.
- ◆ Plan and provide visitor surveys for changing populations and leisure trends.
- ◆ Know and use all the tools available to actively participate in the nation's growth management agenda and help craft comprehensive stewardship strategies that are feasible. Only by participating can we be part of the solution.

Notes:

1. A report of the National Park Service's 21st Century Task Force.

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