

Introduction and Acknowledgments

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The theme of the 2007 George Wright Society Conference on Parks, Protected Areas, and Cultural Sites, “Rethinking Protected Areas in a Changing World,” was a challenge to the community of park and resource professionals to assess the large-scale changes that are transforming the world. Climate change, shifting demographics, the erosion of biological diversity, the democratization of heritage, and the rise of civic engagement were just a few of the trends taken up by seven plenary sessions, over 130 concurrent sessions, and a week-long poster session. In addition, an immense range of other topics were discussed, spanning the entire spectrum of natural and cultural resource disciplines and the social sciences. The conference was held in St. Paul, Minnesota, April 16–20, and was the 14th in a series of conferences that date back to 1976.

A record crowd of 916 attendees made the week a most vibrant one. There were many highlights during the meeting, but a particularly outstanding addition was the inaugural Native Participant Travel Grant (NPTG) Program. The interface between Native interests and protected areas is a realm of great ferment, both in terms of policy and philosophy. To have genuine and critically enriching dialogue, there must be face-to-face engagement between Native and non-Native people. This dialogue can lead to multi-directional learning, improved relationships, new conservation strategies, and expanded vision. Launched in partnership with the National Park Service, the NPTG is intended to foster this dialogue. Applications were invited from non-student indigenous people from Canada, Mexico, or the USA who were involved in the protection, management, or study of Native lands, their biological and cultural systems and features, or Native land rights. Out of a strong applicant pool, the NPTG was able to support the participation of 12 Native people at the GWS2007 conference. We hope to make the NPTG a permanent feature of our biennial conferences.

This proceedings volume contains more than 60 papers that are broadly representative of those presented at the conference. It is available in both paperback and CD-ROM editions, and individual papers may be downloaded from the GWS website. In lieu of appearing here, a number of other papers that originated at the conference were published in our journal, *The George Wright Forum*. In addition, a cluster of wilderness-related papers from the conference appeared in the December 2007 issue of the *International Journal of Wilderness*.

The GWS is grateful to the many people who made GWS2007 possible. At the heart of the effort is the Conference Committee. Chaired by Abigail Miller, the 2007 Conference Committee members were Gillian Bowser, Rolf Diamant, David J. Parsons, William H. Walker, and Stephen Woodley. Equally important are our organizational sponsors and supporters, all of whom have worked with us for many years: the National Park Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, and Eastern National.

Beyond that, the GWS is grateful to the many individuals who helped make this conference happen. For securing vital funding for the conference, our thanks go to Sue Haseltine

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The next conference will be held March 2-6, 2009, in Portland, Oregon.