

Charting a Course for the 1990s: A Summary of the El Paso Conference

Thomas M. Gavin

**USNPS Western Regional Office
1990 Conference Co-Chair**

With the Society's Sixth Conference on Research and Resource Management in the National Parks and Equivalent Reserves behind us now, I would like to summarize the results and my thoughts on the conference.

Let me begin by stating that my general impression of the conference is that it was well-organized, well-attended despite national budget uncertainties and travel restrictions, and highly successful. Most people seemed to find that El Paso and the Westin Hotel provided a perfect cultural setting for the conference. The hotel staff did a terrific job in accommodating our membership, and the park staff at Chamizal National Memorial were outstanding hosts

and most helpful throughout the week.

On the final day of the conference, participants were given a ballot containing the issues raised during the week's concurrent workshops and asked to choose the five most important. The following issues, along with others identified in the Society's Strategic Plan (currently being developed by the Board of Directors), will form the basis for the Society's platform for the 1990s:

- *Global Climate Change*
- *Fauna: Population Dynamics and Management*
- *Monitoring Needs, Principles, and Techniques*
- *Communicating Threats: Considerations for Success*
- *External Influences and Considerations for Ecosystem and Political Boundary Management*

At the end of this summary is a listing of issue statements written during the remainder of the more than 20 concurrent workshops held during the conference. There were also several write-in issue statements received during the balloting, but none received enough support to surface as a Society platform thrust.

Judging from the five platform issues selected, it would appear that the membership is becoming much more diversified with respect to its management, cultural, and interpretive interests; a move away from the pure science emphasis that the Society has been associated with in past years. This, I feel, is a reflection of healthy growth within the Society and by its nature is most appropriate for an organization that bears the name of George Wright. At least four of the issues (climate change, moni-

toring, communicating threats, external influences) are universal in nature in that they apply equally to both cultural and natural resources. It is also clear from the voting that while the Society is concerned about events taking place outside of our preserves, it hopes to counter such threats through the power of science and data collection rather than through a political approach which in the long run could conflict with the original intent of the Society's charter.

As conference co-chair, I am recommending that the Society use its human and fiscal resources to achieve goals tied to one or all of the platform issues adopted in El Paso, and that these issues be emphasized throughout the Society's Strategic Plan. These are the issues, as identified by the concurrent workshops, along with suggested actions that will enable the Society to counter them:

Workshop A3—Global Climate Change

Issue: Global climate change threatens not only parks and reserves, but the integrity of the entire biosphere in which our cultural and natural heritage has evolved. This threat, therefore, subsumes all others and should be considered as a platform initiative.

Action by GWS: Inventory and establish baselines; coordinate research; standardize methods; select indicator systems and species; identify long- and short-term sensitive processes; preserve biodiversity. **Education:** Develop educational tools to explain the causes and risks of global climate change. **Government:** Lead by example.

Workshop B1—Fauna: Population Dynamics and Management

Issue: Development, both existing and planned, may contribute to unanticipated resource impacts and human/wildlife conflicts. (For example, facility placement at Big Bend National Park may contribute to mountain lion attacks. Snowplowed roads in Yellowstone National Park provide energy-efficient routes for bison to travel on during winter months. This allows for greater ease in accessing winter feeding areas which *may* contribute to less natural mortality and subsequent population increases.)

Action by GWS: Establish a small grants (competitive) program that provides dollars on an annual basis for research and development leading to techniques which could anticipate or resolve development-related faunal conflicts.

Issue: Most parks are increasingly becoming biogeographic islands. This can be both a direct threat to park fauna and increase the opportunity for conflict with park neighbors.

Action by GWS: Support funding for research on population viability analysis, especially as it relates to numerically small populations.

Issue: Understanding of faunal population dynamics lags behind state-of-the-art technology which could be employed and developed to enhance that understanding.

Action by GWS: Develop a fund to purchase specialized equipment and data analysis. For example: radio telemetry, video recorders, computer software for data analysis, DNA probes, and fingerprinting.

Statement of Principle strongly recommended by workshop partici-

plans for the GWS to consider as a platform issue: "Biodiversity and ecosystem integrity are the highest and best goals within the USNPS mandate. GWS should support these both scientifically and as a goal for public education."

Workshop C2—Monitoring Needs, Principles, and Techniques

Issue: Ignorance of resource conditions is the greatest threat to the integrity of parks and their intrinsic values. Identifying and defining changes in resource conditions, i.e., monitoring, is fundamental to park protection and preservation.

Action by GWS: 1. Encourage development of better ways to acquire and communicate knowledge of resource conditions, such as: (a) produce a video presentation of GWS meetings, indexed by presentation, that would be widely available via a tape library; (b) provide a professional publication outlet for presentation and evaluation of monitoring methodology. 2. Encourage development of objective measures of accountability for knowing resource conditions. Establish professional criteria for measuring resource conditions via formal peer review/discussion and publications.

Workshop D1—Communicating Threats: Considerations for Success

Issue: The failure to effectively communicate threats to a wide audience hampers and may even doom the mission of parks and reserves not only in the USA, but around the world. A major effort is needed to educate people about threats to parks.

Action by GWS: The George Wright Society should assist in developing strategies for integrating research and resource management information on threats into public relations, interpretation, and communication activities of the NPS. Such strategies should include ways to link specific threats with global resource issues and provide various means of taking explicit action for reducing the seriousness of the threat. Examples of strategies might include the development of "research interpreters," identifying methods for targeting audiences with facts and emotional information, and publishing the research abstracts and platform of the GWS to a wider audience.

Workshop E1—External Influences and Considerations for Ecosystem and Political Boundary Management

Issue: Parks are not independent biotic units by virtue of their boundaries and size. Global, national, state/provincial, local, and individual actions, uses, and impacts are real or potential threats to the purposes and resources of every protected area in the world. Park managing agencies lack: legal/ administrative authority; fiscal, technical, and human resources; and the sociopolitical prominence to assure the long-term safeguards for the protection of park values and resources.

Action by GWS: The George Wright Society should include in its position statements strong support for aggressive involvement by the USNPS in comprehensive planning strategies for adjacent/related lands. The resolution should recommend policy directives, funding initiatives, and

employee support and development.

In addition to the recommendations above, I would like to submit the following list of more specific action items which surfaced during the conference and would appear to be practicable within the present sphere of our platform:

In support of platform item A3:

Devote a future Society conference to the issue of global climate change, with *solicited* international participation by representatives of other environmental organizations and government agencies with formal positions and action plans on the issue. Provide matching grant funds for the research and development leading to the publication of standardized methods and the identification of indicator species to monitor global change.

In support of platform item B1:

Have the Society lend the specialized equipment referred to above (software, DNA probes, etc.) to universities, agencies, and other users.

In support of platform item D1:

Devote a complete issue of the *Forum* to strategies for communicating threats. Encourage a more aggressive and visible public representation of the Society to formally present a "Society position" on different threats—both their causes and effects. Develop a proactive posture as a Society through the development of threat-related Society "white papers," suitable for publication.

In support of platform item E1:

Provide formal Society comment on park and reserve protection plans, urban development plans, etc., as they relate to new park acquisitions or expansion. Impress on the membership the importance of becoming active on planning commissions and within their work environment to work for the long-term protection of park values and resources.

In addition to the action items listed above, I would like to recommend that the Board of Directors create a working committee which would meet annually to discuss the Society's progress as it relates to platform issues. Additionally, this committee would provide a continual source of recommendations to the Board on related opportunities for Society involvement and full implementation of platform initiatives.

Attendance & New Memberships

According to a count of registration forms, 252 people attended the conference. This seems low. Our general impression was that 300+ attended.

Jonathan Bayless and Stephanie Toothman signed up 101 new or lapsed members. In addition, 10 others signed up directly at the registration desk, for a total of 111.

Awards

Robert Moon received the Francis Jacot Memorial Award, given by the Society for outstanding contributions to natural resources management programs in national parks and equivalent reserves. Since 1980 Moon has been the Chief of the Division of Resources Management at Joshua Tree National Monument in California. Previously, he held positions

with the University of California and the College of the Desert. He holds an M.S. in Ecology from the University of California at Irvine. The award was presented to Moon for his outstanding work in vegetation and fire management, and his work with the endangered tortoise at Joshua Tree.

Finances of the Conference

The Society spent about \$33,100 directly on the conference. This figure represents direct expenditures only; a sizable portion of other expenditures by the executive office, such as salaries, utilities, and office supplies, could be attributed to the conference. When all invoices are paid, the Society will have received about \$28,400 in conference receipts, leaving a difference of \$4,700.

Conclusion

As I stated in my closing remarks to the Sixth Conference, it is unrealistic to believe that the Society can completely resolve any of our platform issues, especially within the next decade. However, I hope that at the end of the decade, when we ponder our platform for the year 2000 and beyond, that we can reflect on our recent accomplishments and demonstrate that the Society has *contributed* its resources in a fashion which lessens the impacts of the issues identified within our platform.

Let me take this final opportunity to thank the Board of Directors and my co-chair, Frank Smith of Chamizal, for all your support and guidance over the last two years. As I consider the successes of the Sixth Conference, I look forward to the implementation of our platform over the next decade and hope that the Seventh Conference will be designed with these platform issues in mind.

APPENDIX

ISSUE STATEMENTS AND SUGGESTED ACTIONS FROM OTHER WORKSHOPS

A1—Deteriorating Air Quality: A Universal Legacy

Issue: Deteriorating air quality poses a threat to not only our national parks and reserves but to all organisms on this planet. To reverse this trend will take a monumental effort from humankind in general; the GWS can contribute to this effort by adopting this issue as a platform initiative for the next decade.

Action by GWS: Assess within-park pollution sources, including campfires and other wood-burning sources, concession and government facilities, and transportation sources. The aggregate may be locally significant enough to influence regional air quality values. Traditional campfires may have to be curtailed at times, but this may better focus the concern of the public about wildland air quality, which in turn might result in greater movement from apathy to action. Improve information regarding research to all principals with emphasis on standardization of monitoring and research protocols between cooperating agencies. This would include the sharing of successful mitigation strategies to assure that air quality resources are being directed toward the highest needs, while reducing the chance of costly duplication.

A2—Toxins in Our Preserves

Issue: Toxins are an insidious threat to biotic resources in the parks through the process of biomagnification. Their effects are chronic and often not easily detected. The

GWS recognizes this as a potentially significant resource hazard that has been relatively unrecognized in the parks. Managers must become more aware of the need to conduct baseline surveys of their biotas with emphasis on top trophic level organization.

Action by GWS: The Society should meet this need by taking steps to increase awareness of the threat of toxins in our preserves by sponsoring publications and workshops on this issue.

B2—Flora: Disturbances to and Successional Patterns of Selected Native North American Plant Assemblages

Issue: The lack of systematic review and evaluation of vegetation management programs threatens the long-term integrity of park ecosystems. Examples include prescribed fire objectives (season of burns), method of prioritizing exotic species problems and responses, equilibrium-based management strategies, natural fire management policy, poorly defined USNPS role in efforts to maintain successional species. [No actions specified.]

Issue: The lack of a synthetic, holistic, ecosystem perspective in problem-solving frequently results in spillover effects or impacts to other system components. Examples include: removing hazard fuels during seasons when burning is comfortably controllable may result in changes in forest composition or structure, removing feral or domestic herbivores may unleash exotic species or alter fire regimes.

Actions by GWS: Encourage a broad-based review of action programs, systematic monitoring, and in

creased exchange of knowledge at all levels.

Issue: The lack of basic information, including inventory, population and system dynamics, vegetation history, and human influences, prevents formulation of management strategies that can be expected to efficiently and cost-effectively meet important goals. Examples: How to mitigate impacts of air pollution with status dynamics of many basic components, how to effectively remove exotic species without tremendous counter-direction system responses, and how to maximize efficiency and lower costs, are all unknown.

Issue: Variable and sometimes conflicting vegetation management missions and directives result in seemingly incompatible management requirements. Without clarification, widely divergent vegetation management perspectives will evolve at parks experiencing similar challenges. Example: Maintaining specific successional species, maximizing biodiversity, and permitting process-driven ecosystem dynamics are not necessarily congruent concepts, yet all are generally perceived to be policy directives. A park may choose to favor one or the other.

Actions by GWS: Develop guidelines to assign specific USNPS units or portions of units a primary vegetation management perspective, defined to be either: (a) process-driven; (b) process-driven but combined with restoration actions to mitigate human impacts, or (c) specific "landscape goals," such as preserving a given species.

C1—Geographic Information System (GIS) in Our Work Place

Issue: The natural and cultural resources of public and private lands experience continual direct and indirect changes, many the result of human activities. It is absolutely necessary to determine and monitor these resources through a computerized system available to and usable by all resource managers at a reasonable price.

Actions by GWS: The GWS should endorse and promote the adoption and continued use of GIS for documenting resources. Specifically, the GWS should: Inquire of the USNPS Director his definite beliefs and expectations in the next 3 to 5 years. Encourage expansion of the USNPS planning budget to ensure that GIS is adequately promoted and funded. Help develop a cadre of GIS specialists to retain at present and build on our expected future investment. Encourage better GIS education for *all* managers. Work with and develop federal, state, and local government and private organizations into a coalition supporting and promoting the use of GIS in management actions where necessary. Urge consideration of effective alternatives for other automated programs, and infuse GIS into them where beneficial and feasible. Encourage that successful GIS programs be applied in areas such as personnel, data, hardware, etc. Work to make sure GIS is not applied to wrong issues, but emphasize that it *must* be a part of any comprehensive planning strategy. Urge that GIS be used in life-cycle management—it can hold “all of the story.” Help maximize the analytical capability of

GIS to effectively communicate our needs and concerns—a picture’s worth a thousand words. Now that we started it, let’s use it. Use GIS as a means to an end; it is not the end itself.

C3—Measuring and Maintaining Watershed Integrity: A Key in Predicting Ecosystem Demise

[Statement of issue and suggested actions not received in time to put on ballot.]

D2—Communicating Threats: Dispelling Apathy

Issue: Ignorance and apathy threaten resources in a variety of ways. They are the catalyst that creates a reaction producing misunderstanding, political inactivity, or vandalism. At times they are the reaction to problems. Bureaucracy creates apathy. Whether the root or the branch, the tree of ignorance or vine of apathy produce a bitter fruit of lost resources and opportunities, surrender without struggle, and dissension.

Actions by GWS: Advocate a public education requirement as part of all research and resource management programs that will define in simple terms the goal of the program before it begins and a summary of the work when completed. Express support for the increased emphasis the USNPS has given to public involvement, cooperation with park neighbors, and cooperation with local, state, and federal government organizations. Encourage team-building activities in the operational divisions of field areas and central offices to ensure that barriers are broken down and channels of communication opened and maintained. The goal is to develop

wide support for and understanding of resource preservation.

D3—The Columbus Quincentenary: A Medium for Intercultural Exchange and Understanding

Issue: The opportunity may be lost to educate the public regarding the dramatic effect the European encounter had upon the social and natural environment of the New World.

Actions by GWS: To ensure substantive benefit from the Columbus Quincentenary, the Society should take an active role in the development of ongoing programs of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary studies regarding the pre- and post-Columbian social and natural environment. The Society should encourage the exploration of non-traditional means to accurately and meaningfully communicate cultural sensitivity.

E2—Internal Ramifications: Use or Abuse?

Issue: Natural and cultural resources in parks and reserves have been compromised by recreational and commercial use.

Actions by GWS: Identify and assess recreational and commercial activities (e.g., rock climbing, aircraft overflights, audio disturbance, developments) which impair and degrade tangible and intangible resources consistent with USNPS mandates. Increase information gathering to determine the level of impacts, and devise mitigation strategies. Improve communication and education concerning these impacts and USNPS mandates.

F1—The US National Park Service and the Human Remains Issue

Issue: Nurturing and respecting cultural diversity is just as important to the welfare and success of parks as is protecting ecosystem integrity and biodiversity. The past debate on the repatriation issue manifested many of the threats to cultural diversity, including a lack of cross-cultural sensitivity, the difficulty of promoting a multicultural ethic, and mutual distrust among different interest groups. [No actions specified.]

F2—Restoration Successes and Failures

Issue: Many USNPS units have severely degraded natural systems. Sources of disturbance include mining, construction, and cattle grazing. Many disturbances predate the creation of the unit, while others are associated with recent developments. Without intervention, many sites will not be restored naturally. In fact, without stabilization many sites continue to deteriorate. Therefore, restoration based on solid research is critically needed.

Actions by GWS: Develop a position on pending legislation, such as new mining law, with provisions for restoration. Develop a position in favor of mining rights acquisition in areas such as Alaska. At the next conference, create a panel made up of key authors of the vegetation management sections of NPS-77 and the USNPS Western Region's *Handbook for Revegetation in the Western Region* to address emerging restoration issues. Devote one issue of the *Forum* to restoration successes.

F3—Let's Talk Non-Renewable Resources

Issue: *Documentation and Information:*

The integrity of cultural resources (archaeological sites, structures, museum objects, landscapes, and ethnographic resources) is threatened by: insufficient resource inventory, lack of planning documents (e.g., collection management plans) and resource condition assessment, and insufficient monitoring. *Physical Threats:* Resources are threatened through uncontrolled development on adjacent lands, vandalism and looting, erosion through natural and human-made causes, inadequate storage and environmental controls for collections, and the lack or loss of archival records related to cultural resources and treatments.

Actions by GWS: Work with and support the strategic planning effort of the USNPS to address these threats, as follows: promote the development and transfer of technology to solve cultural resource preservation problems; increase the use of partnerships with federal, state, and local governments to plan for and protect against external threats to park resources; make preservation of cultural resources an interdisciplinary concern and function; protect and retain the archival record of resources and management actions; reduce security and fire risks to collections; increase emphasis on public education and employee training; increase law enforcement efforts against vandalism and theft; and encourage broader participation of cultural resources staff and other programs, such as maintenance and law enforcement, in the Society.

G1—Policy, Politics, Problems, and Progress: Issues and Roadblocks

Issue: Issues affecting but not controllable by park authorities threaten to nullify our efforts. This threat is exacerbated by the fact that land management agencies lack specific legal mandates to deal with these emerging issues.

Actions by GWS: Issues larger than the parks are overtaking them. The Society needs to advocate that the USNPS be given a broader mandate and a refocusing of its mission to meet these new threats. The Society should urge the USNPS to undertake a proactive education program with interpretation, public involvement programs such as Earthwatch, and school programs. The Society should encourage the USNPS to develop broadly coherent, systematic approaches (handbooks) to foster consistency in management policies and actions for the future.

G2—Policy, Politics, Problems, and Progress: Progress Reports

[Statement of issue and suggested actions not received in time to put on ballot.]

G3—Policy, Politics, Problems, and Progress: International Developments

Issue: Natural and cultural resources are threatened by limited communication across political boundaries. Limited projects accomplished or in the planning stage have demonstrated that sharing of data, research, and methodology is practical and economically beneficial.

Actions by GWS: Encourage the immediate establishment of a central repository to collect available journals, research reports, and

project data from other nations, and disseminate to central offices and field areas translated abstracts of material collected. Express concern to the U.S. Department of the Interior that unrealistic international travel restrictions, especially for field researchers, field interpreters, and field resource managers, endangers their ability to develop cooperative relationships to meet resource threats. Express support for a formal, greatly increased, systematic approach to international exchange: peer-to-peer, agency-to-agency, and nation-to-nation.

Issue: Inadequate understanding of the cultural relationships within the preservation-utilization continuum may significantly decrease the levels of achievement in international resource management projects.

Actions by GWS: Encourage the USNPS to take the lead in developing training and publications addressing the broad cultural differences involved in international resource management projects, recognizing that these differences may otherwise be exceptionally significant barriers to successful resource management in continent-wide and planet-wide projects.

Special Recommendation: The Society, through communications with Congressional leaders and administrative departments, voice its unequivocal support for strong enforcement of the Unesco Convention on the repatriation of national treasures and cultural properties on the part of the federal government, and strong enforcement of all laws relating to this Convention.

A sampling of write-in issue statements & suggestions:

"The GWS believes the highest values of the U.S. National Park System are embodied in a mandate for protection and preservation of natural and cultural resources, above all other uses." [Appeared on seven ballots.]

"Failure to have good interpretation programs in parks will lead to public apathy and loss of support."

"The greatest effect to preservation of resources in the USNPS would be to change the organizational structure, similar to the military, so that professionals would report to line management administratively but report to their discipline for the professional aspects of their position."

"Provincial, territorial behavior on the part of park scientists threatens the scientific credibility of park science. This issue is avoided if scientific research is competed in a national peer-reviewed program like that used by the National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy, etc."

"Minimum academic requirements are needed to professionalize the USNPS."

"The USNPS needs to define with precision its resource management goals and objectives, and improve its ability and willingness to address those goals on a regional rather than a park-by-park basis."

"The GWS should cultivate private funding sources (e.g., The Nature Conservancy) to acquire inholdings (private property rights) within park boundaries when the USNPS identifies acquisition as the preferred course of action. This

should include mineral rights and water rights as well as surface land ownership."

"The GWS recognizes that the inability of management to take strong stands on controversial issues to protect resources endangers those resources. GWS should provide support to management to defend controversial stands in defense of

park resource—stands which uphold the spirit and the letter of the [USNPS] Organic Act."

"The GWS should take a position supporting U.S. efforts at addressing the global overpopulation issue. Considering the inability of government employees to speak out, GWS could make a difference."



Mark your Calendar now for the 1992 George Wright Society Conference. The week indicated below, while somewhat tentative at this writing, is fairly certain. Where? Jacksonville, Florida. Keep tuned—final arrangements will be made known as soon as *the word* becomes available.

NOVEMBER 1992

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FIRST WEEK IN NOVEMBER 1992—GWS SEVENTH CONFERENCE—JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

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