

THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY SYMPOSIUM

CELEBRATING THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
U. S. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

BILL BRIGGLE, DEPUTY REGIONAL DIRECTOR, PACIFIC NORTHWEST
IN AN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY
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INTRODUCTION BY BILL BROWN

To establish the base of the tape, I would indicate that it's May 24, 1991, and Bill Brown, ex-Park Service Historian is here in discussion with Bill Briggie, Deputy Regional Director of the Pacific Northwest Region. We're in our respective locations. Mine is Gustavus, Alaska; Bill Briggie's is Seattle. We're going to talk about the National Park Service's 75th Anniversary Symposium. A question is: Why this discussion, or interview? Melody Webb felt that The George Wright Society's *FORUM* would be a good place for Bill Briggie to share the experiences and aspirations of the Symposium steering committee, which he heads—where we're going, why we're going, and what result we seek.

BILL BROWN: *Bill, could you begin by giving us some kind of a background on the 75th Anniversary Symposium? Why did it get started and what's it about?*

BILL BRIGGLE: Thank you Bill, and to the Society for their past and continued support to the Service and the opportunity to discuss an important event that is unfolding during this, the 75th Anniversary of the National Park Service.

The idea of an anniversary symposium began over a year ago. Director Jim Ridenour and Deputy Director Herb Cables desired a forum by which they could re-examine Service capabilities, structure, programs, and policies. They conceived the idea of a symposium that would allow a process for citizen evaluation of our programs and identify opportunities to improve our capabilities to meet the future. To carry out the thinking, the Director appointed a group of Park Service

people to take the lead, and develop an action plan. It was the consensus of this group that a stellar cross-section of those whose work, writings and observations have probed the operations and values of our parks should be invited to assist. These divergent interests could examine the issues facing us and help close the gaps between what we've done and what we must do in the 21st Century. It was the opinion that this would be an undertaking well worth the effort and time devoted to it. It's important to note that we received generous support from outside the Service, to plan the Symposium. With the Service matching the contributions. Our goal was to enlist the best thinking of citizens and experts inside and outside of government, to chart a dynamic course for the future. To do this we engaged the World Wildlife Fund/The Conservation Foundation and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Both of these institu-

tions have an excellent record of dealing with conservation and management issues on a worldwide scale. Another important partner that came on board was the National Park Foundation, who has been long active in our programs: its credo is to assist the Park Service in its mission. With these co-sponsors on line, and the National Park Service in the center, we were ready to begin the task before us.

Recent studies and reports about the Service gave us a good starting point. The most notable of these, is "The National Park and Conservation Association Report on the National Park System." An internal group, appointed by former Director Bill Mott, also took a look into the 21st Century. With these two thought-provoking reports to guide us, and discussions with many people inside and outside the Service as to their views on the major issues, we had much of the background we needed.

A prestigious Steering Committee was Chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act to develop work issues, segregating them into four themes: *Environmental Leadership, Resources Stewardship, Organizational Renewal, and Park Use and Enjoyment*. We then sought the best leadership from outside the Service to head up each of these working groups. Special pains were taken to assure that the Service did not overwhelm this effort, while remaining a major player in the process. The working groups, comprised of nine members, included six outside members, and three from the Service.

BILL BROWN: *With all this high powered help brought in through your consortium, people might assume that the ideas are already in. I think that*

would be wrong. I think you want continuing participation from the readers of the FORUM and the Courier, both inside and outside the Service. Is that true?

BILL BRIGGLE: The jury is still out, and the process we have embraced, allows and encourages dialogue, both prior to the Symposium, and afterward.

BILL BROWN: *Bill, in reading over Glenn Baker's Symposium article for the Courier, my eye lit on the theme of the Symposium, "Protecting our National Parks: Challenges and Strategies for the 21st Century," and I thought about the word "protecting." Often in the past that word has been used in a defensive way—the parks barricading against the outside world. In today's world, that old-line defensive posture is dubious policy. I think we have to go forth beyond our boundaries and turn the situation around out there.*

BILL BRIGGLE: I agree, and our Park Managers are for the most part stepping out of their traditional role of watching events unfold outside the park. They have become more aggressive in calling attention to threats to the boundaries, and with encouragement, will become more effective. I believe the public expects the Service to be a strong advocate when it comes to speaking out on environmental issues that pose a threat to park values.

BILL BROWN: *One of the things that came up during our 21st Century Task Force work was an effort to restate the Park Service mission. You and I both took the position that the NPS Organic Act, like the Constitution of the United States, gave us a mission broad enough to respond creatively to an evolving world. We have an evolved mission that is moving with the evolving world, but we still have those tablets in stone that*

say we will preserve, unimpaired, for the use and enjoyment of future generations. Is that old statement still adequate to meet changing needs and times?

BILL BRIGGLE: In my opinion our mission statement is still adequate. However, I believe we should consider redefining our goals, and establish new goals where necessary, to ensure that we stay relevant with our current and future needs.

BILL BROWN: *The analog, I think, is the Supreme Court Reports vis-à-vis our constitutional history. Periodically, as a Service, we convene a court of elders, within our ranks or with outside help, and we say: "Define our mission for this day, and for the next 10 years, and the next 20 years." I think we are able to use that fundamental statement in the founding Act—the one that all of us have memorized—and add branches to the tree that is the National Park Service and System. This has been a very good thing. But why is it, Bill, that our "future" studies (and you and I have participated in a number of them over the years) tend to elicit a flurry of responses and then wind up on the shelf? It seems that our dreams and aspirations outstrip our ability to realize them. Of course the world is moving ever faster, and these "challenges" grow ever greater. What makes you think this Symposium is going to have a more lasting effect?*

BILL BRIGGLE: I've given this considerable thought. Many well intentioned people have provided plans and recommendations on how we should conduct our business. Reports have been prepared and some good recommendations have been adopted, while others have fallen by the wayside. There is no one single answer, but I would hazard a guess, that given our

decentralized organization, where accountability and the decision to "sign on" is not always enforced, plus a lack of synergism up and down, account for a share of the problem. Hopefully this Symposium: "Challenges and Strategies for the 21st Century," will offer the right ingredients to make the difference. This is the first time, to my knowledge, that the Service has had the opportunity to stage an event of this magnitude before such a broad spectrum of public interest. We're saying to these interests: "Take a look, let's examine together what we do, how we do it, and where we should be." In my earlier words about the Symposium's origin, I described the building of this partnership. We have a Charter, approved by Interior Secretary Lujan, which allows us to bring in the public, and encourage full involvement. The Symposium will provide an opportunity to perfect the ideas that come forth, as partners in a larger public concern. There is no chasm here, between the public, and the Service entrusted with its parks and cultural resources. This is the elixir that will give life and value to these proceedings.

Beyond the Symposium itself, a more aware public base exists; aware of the parks certainly, but also aware of larger environmental concerns; the plight of the old growth forests and the spotted owl, the Exxon Valdez oil spill, and similar happenings have stunned this enlightened public, made it receptive to environmental conservation, of which the National Parks are premier examples. This public concern will further the Symposium's momentum. We build on past studies and reports, the good work already in place, and now must go further, by instituting

an "organizational mentality," to take the recommendations and make them work, to present them in such a manner that they will not pose undue threats, and can be readily understood by the people who have to implement them, as well as by the people who will be on the receiving end. It's also essential that Congress and the executive branches feel comfortable with the final outcome. So given these "windows of opportunities" and the enthusiasm that is, and will be, generated I'm optimistic that we can orchestrate a continuing process of improvement in our programs, policies, and structure.

BILL BROWN: *Bill, taking the cue from your last remarks, let's shift now to a closer analysis of the four Symposium themes. Because I think this "organizational mentality" concept is so important, I'd like to start with "organizational renewal." I think all of us agreed that at this time, with things moving so rapidly, with our evolving mission reaching out internationally to such subjects as global change, and given the stresses in our well-established activities, organizational renewal means more than just a few shifts in personnel management. What do you see as organizational renewal?*

BILL BRIGGLE: To keep any organization viable, it must enhance the resources available to it. We want to be the best place to work, whether it be in training, professional development, housing needs, or emphasis on the health and welfare of our employees. The ability to retain quality people, the professionalism of our work force, the overall esteem of both career and seasonal employees are absolutely critical. It's been suggested that our current practices tend to dehumanize employees rather than support them,

with a loss of esprit de corps and the sense of family in this organization. We're going to have to look closely at how we respond to people, and try to understand and anticipate their needs better. Moreover, we have to create opportunities that will attract people to come into, and stay with the organization. To do this, we have to run the gamut of the Service: recruiting process, selection process, motivation and training, the retention process for managers and finally career ladders with available rungs. We must insist and expect better management accountability for the organization. We must have long range goals, and strategies to realize them...strategies articulated and personified. Each of us must help develop these objectives, and then "buy" into them.

Development of leadership is crucial for us. We have not focused to the degree needed on leadership succession, expectations of our current leaders, or the line-up that succeeds to these positions. Are we doing a good enough job of preparing people to be our future leaders? Horace Albright said it many years ago, "Just don't let the Park Service become another bureau." His vision was, "be the best." Part of not becoming another "bureau" is a strong commitment to the National Park System, taking professional risks to maintain the integrity of the System.

How do we carry this out? We must be realistic, but not frugal, when setting human resources funding priorities. Our commitment to employee development must be strong if we are to successfully carry out our stewardship responsibilities. To have a successful organization you have to recruit and train leaders

that are motivated and dedicated, and you must gather a core of people that have that same motivation and dedication, to take you where you want to be. Everything worthwhile has its price, and the commitment to do a better job could be tougher to achieve than obtaining the dollars to manage and implement needed change.

BILL BROWN: *Let's follow up on this leadership and retention idea. Those two things go so closely together: getting cadres of people who inspire and lead and drag along the rest, and who then inspire the rest to move on their own. We've had so much layering and partitioning in the Service as it has grown that we've lost that big-hatted person up front, who looks back and waves a hand, and says, "Follow me." We've lost, it seems to me, a lot of the day to day informal communication and fellowship. There are people in leadership roles who don't know the names of the people who work for them. They never visit. They are surprised when they do come downstairs to see how many people are there and how many things they are doing. These lapses seem to me inexcusable if we're serious about the kind of leadership and retention of which you're speaking.*

BILL BRIGGLE: Agreed, and that is going to be the stickiest of the wickets we probably have to deal with. It isn't because we don't have well-intentioned people—we do. But the sometimes excessive demands placed upon these people exhaust and break the bonds. I say on occasion, "where you sit, is how you think." It doesn't take long sitting in a leadership position, before the daily torrent can, and does, take its toll. Unless a conscious effort is made each day, you can find yourself getting further away from your co-

workers and the things that are happening in our parks. It takes a real effort, a great deal of energy, strength, and understanding, to keep strong ties to our people and parks.

BILL BROWN: *I like your comments on retaining qualified people, rather than having them work for a few years for the Park Service, get the training, become effective, and then say, "God, I can't move up and I don't see that glimmering light that calls me on." It seems to me we've got to have a calling. We've got to have an ethos in this Service that transcends these day-by-day attritions. We have to have times to renew ourselves, because we've got such important work to do.*

BILL BRIGGLE: One of the ways to get at that is to offer better career development through career leaders and a well established "mentor system" in place. Leaders who have become mentors, if you will. I am a proponent of the mentor system and I think that through career leaders and career planning, backed by employee development and training programs, much of this can be done. But these tools are only as good as the people who wield them. In my opinion, there's too much lip service paid to these goals and too little accomplishment. Call this the "oughta'bes" and "oughta'dos." We have not fully taken the "oughta'bes" and "oughta'dos" and developed a blueprint for how to achieve the goals, and how to better prepare our employees for leadership roles and for a satisfying career. That must be done. And much of this is accountability and, sadly, we may not be much different in that respect from some other organizations. It's extremely difficult to keep a high level of anticipation, of desire,

motivation, and dedication. I think today that our leadership is under such terrific attack, so busy defending its actions and carrying numerous special thrusts and activities, that it draws them further and further away from the real business of running the National Park System. Perhaps we're not organized as competently and as effectively as we should be. We need to look at the organizational structure and its present capability to see if we're in a position to move on forward and do the kinds of things that retain the quality individual, and keep the spirit high.

BILL BROWN: *Let's go to the two things that form the core of the NPS mission: stewardship and public use. We must maintain a tight stewardship over the parks. We call them resources. We can call them a number of other things. We can call them the nation's "mythic landscapes" and its "mystic chords of memory." And beyond this resource base are the derivations of it: park use and enjoyment.*

Then there is the role of environmental leadership. For now, let's talk about resource stewardship. You mentioned the fact that in these lean years—lean in terms of human society's outgrowing its resource base—the parks and our sister landscapes such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge come under scrutiny for additional resources. We have other resource problems too. What is the state of the public land philosophy today and how can the Symposium help the nation see the great value of preserved land?

BILL BRIGGLE: The Symposium will offer that opportunity because it will showcase some of the most notable conservation leaders in the arena today. It's going to give these people an opportunity to put these concerns "up front." What are the

long-term balances between preservation, conservation, and wise use of our national patrimony—and what is the formula that holds the parks intact, at the same time healing the rest of our environment, the context of the parks? Through dialogue over the issues we'll try to define what we will be doing, and how we will be doing it. Bill, I think the awareness is there. I think our problem is that we have not yet found the best vehicle by which to articulate these critical balances. We are working at this with our interpretive programs, our opportunity to educate. The Symposium will put these issues on the table, and they will be examined in a new perspective. Not just for the present, but for the foreseeable future. And this public airing I believe, is going to offer us an outstanding opportunity to do what is needed.

BILL BROWN: *Let's try "Organizational renewal" and "resource stewardship" together. One of the things we have talked about often and that is a constant drumbeat in conversations I have with others is the fact that many people in the Park Service do not have a direct and enduring connection to the very reason they are working in the Park Service: the parks themselves. What can we do in terms of "resource stewardship" to use the resource base as a mode of organizational renewal? We have George Hartzog's recent statement that only a few people in central offices, and particularly in Washington, DC, have ever served in a park on any kind of assignment. What can we do to get people out of those buildings with their endless hallways and closed doors, and get them placed in a park? All employees should have such direct contact during their careers so they have some notion of what these resources are about, why their work is important, why they're*

working for the Park Service instead of GSA or Sears.

BILL BRIGGLE: There are many employees by the very nature of their job who will not have the opportunity to visit parks in an official capacity. It's probably not practical to expect anything different. On the other hand, there are those who absolutely by the nature of their work and responsibilities must be conversant with park management and stay abreast of the issues. It's not a case of personal desire, rather a "must" part of their overall performance expectations. They must receive encouragement by their supervisors and others on up the line. I believe that people take their signals, get their motivation and direction from "role" models, people they admire and who have credibility. When leaders show an interest, getting out in the parks, getting to know the resource and issues, and communicating with employees and the park visitors it sets the standard of involvement and commitment. This lead by example goes a long way to encourage central office folks to take an interest and actively promote visits to the park.

I've always kept one goal in mind, Bill: I never forget where my roots are—they are inside our national parks! Given the chance, our dedicated office staffs will probably make the opportunity to "get to know the parks" in a responsible manner. After all, the stakes are high and lack of commitment or opportunity by any one segment of the work force is not acceptable.

BILL BROWN: *We're agreed then that going back to the roots and keeping those roots refreshed is critical. How we do it, by what leadership techniques, by what*

formal or informal modes, is less important than the principle: We cannot function as park people if we don't know about parks.

Let's go now to park use and enjoyment, the third theme of the Symposium. Once we have achieved a solid resource stewardship, then the other half of our basic charge comes into play, and that's to bring people into the parks for inspiration, meditation, physical challenge, and the pleasures of a friendly, safe social environment. Parks are places that let people see the natural processes, look back at our history, and achieve healthy recreation. All of these things are long-developed and well-defined, and in these old-line phases of park use the dilemma between preservation and use has always been with us. But maybe there are some other kinds of park use that we have not thought about—park use that goes beyond the pleasuring grounds and physical challenge, park use that will help the larger world. We can look upon parklands as treasures in the world's data bank as we confront global change, as part of a worldwide scientific effort to ameliorate such change. How can we focus this evolved social utility of the parks—so important to their survival?

BILL BRIGGLE: A more sophisticated framework for scientific monitoring and research is needed. The data we obtain will provide us with the tools to establish limits of acceptable use. It will determine the appropriate balance between meeting people's expectations for modern conveniences while providing for resource-based park experiences. We've got to know more about our public and their impact on the resource. I think we're beginning to find that out through studies now in progress. We thought for a long time that we knew what the public

expected in the enjoyment of their parks and what they wanted in return. But I'm unsure at this point. I believe the information that's being gathered will give us insight on how to maintain the atmosphere in which visitors can be inspired by the values of the parks. How does such inspiration begin? Early education is the first step, and that's why we really must become more involved in educational outreach programs. It helps the potential park users to better understand what they need and what they expect to get from a park visit.

Obviously we're beginning to experience a new type of park user. We have seen the influence of the Pacific Rim nations and Southern border countries. We've already seen the need to respond to the aging, the handicapped, and to culturally and ethnically diverse populations. We need to know what they expect from the parks and what we can realistically deliver; how we presently do business may not cut it 15 or 25 years from now. We're going to be exposing national parks to a whole new world of users—people who come from different backgrounds and have different expectations. The major question here is, do we sacrifice the values that we've held dear to us or do we embrace these new users, take the time to understand their cultures and see how we can bring them all together in a national park that they can understand and enjoy?

BILL BROWN: *I would answer yes to the question of "finding new ways," and go back to the other, scientific/environmental part of my question. I remember years ago, in the late 60s and early 70s, we concentrated on instilling environmental ethics through environ-*

mental interpretation, using the parks as models for environmental management. Sometimes the hand got a bit heavy in that effort. Our goal was protection of the parks through environmental interpretation. I think the need is greater than ever today, but I think our message must be more subtle and sophisticated than before. I think people today are much more aware of the environmental health problems that beset the world. They are seeing a world that is physically changing in a threatening manner. Through our interpretive programs and through the experiences we offer these diverse publics you're talking about, we have to show that the parks are instruments for public benefit: as models of good land use and as research and data stations monitoring the global changes that appear in the headlines daily.

That brings us to our last major theme: environmental leadership. We're all aware of the fact that a part of a system can't survive if the whole of the system is going down. I think that's the big message that ties right back to our basic charge—our basic mission set forth in the Organic Act. If we are to save the parks, then the larger environmental context of those parks must be healthy. We know this because our parks, even the large ones, are postage stamps in that larger context. How do we achieve a social utility within the parks through participation in biospheric science that really does make us leaders in the environmental solutions the world needs today?

BILL BRIGGLE: It will help to build a broader constituency and to lead by example. An anecdote helps here: some of the people at the Kennedy School of Government were asked how they perceived various agencies in government, particularly the National Park Ser-

vice. These very bright and talented leaders and managers of tomorrow viewed the National Park Service as a custodian, a custodian of lands. Now, is that how we want to be perceived, as simply a custodian of lands? Certainly, we don't perceive ourselves that way. Of course we manage and take care of the parks and we're very proud of that and we will continue to do that. But where do we step beyond this role—continue with it but step on forward to build a constituency that can convey the values of the National Park System to a more diverse and enlightened public, enlist it in a more diverse cause, a global cause, one where we are a very active player rather than simply standing on the sideline? Our parks represent some of the finest examples of the environment in the world today. We are looked upon, I'm sure, as being an organization that has a significant role to play. The question is, "Are we prepared to play it?" And if we are prepared to play that active role, how far into it do we want to go? That's the question that we are going to be addressing during the next several months. What is our role? The answer to that will help determine our environmental leadership role and ultimate influence.

BILL BROWN: *I couldn't agree more. There has to be a unifying philosophy that defines how far we go, how holistic we're going to be in environmental leadership. In utilizing the parks, not only for education, but also as baseline areas in the scientific endeavor necessary to correct some of the imbalances in our biosphere, we must be guided by a philosophy that fits individual disciplines into a path—a course. Otherwise, our ships will sail on important missions that never come together, never culminate in results.*

BILL BRIGGLE: That is something that we cannot afford to let happen. And I know that Park Service people today don't want that to happen. The question is, "How do we get ourselves organizationally and mentally prepared for this expanded mission?" The Symposium where we'll be talking and learning over the next several months, may hold the key to the answers we seek. We can't afford to ignore the answers.

BILL BROWN: *That's why you've got a Consortium.*

BILL BRIGGLE: And it's their perspective we're seeking.

BILL BROWN: *We've run the string on our hour discussion. Do you have any summing-up statement you'd like to make?*

BILL BRIGGLE: This Symposium is a unique effort to improve the performance of government. Through the process which we have defined it is the hope that we can provide the framework for continuing discussion on the future of the National Park Service among citizens and their public officials.

