

Wading into the NBS Pool

Some Thoughts from the GWS Executive Office

The National Biological Survey will materialize about the same time that these pages are read. Most everyone can see giant benefits to be gained. And yet, almost all the same everyones also fear that separating scientists from their land-managing agencies could leave the agencies without needed daily scientific counsel. We have received copies of several lengthy and heartfelt letters from members who wrote to Secretary of the Interior Babbitt to express these fears. Our own fears extend more to the long-term survival of what is currently envisioned. As long as Bruce Babbitt is at Interior, the NBS is one thing; if another James Watt emerges, it could become quite another. History rarely if ever repeats itself exactly, but what happens if NBS tires of (or is *told* to tire of) research related to parks and reserves, and the scientists disappear from the parks scene as they did in 1940?

Some of you may also have wondered, as we certainly have, what the creation of NBS means for the future of the Society. After all, Park Service scientists have been one of the core groups of our membership, and now they will be transferring wholesale to NBS. (In fact, the GWS president, Gary Davis, and our treasurer, Steve Veirs, are among those who will be making the move.) Is the Society so closely identified with “Park Service science” that the creation of the NBS will, in effect, pull the rug out from under us?

The answer, we think—we hope—is “no.” The Society was never intended to be a group mainly for Park Service scientists, although that perception continues to be held by some. In fact, the Society’s motto, which speaks of “the protection,

preservation and management of cultural and natural parks and reserves through research and education”—with no particular emphasis on *national* parks, and certainly no exclusive focus on science—really is a succinct and accurate statement of what we are about. Now obviously we are vitally interested in promoting better scientific research in national parks, but whether that research is carried on by the Park Service, the NBS, other agencies, or academics is a secondary consideration—as long as the research is effectively coordinated with the management of the area.

That, of course, could be the big sticking-point with the NBS set-up. So we look forward to fostering a close working relationship between the Park Service and the NBS. But more than that, the Society must reach out to new NBS employees who did *not* transfer from the Park Service. The largest contingent of scientists going into NBS will be from the Fish and Wildlife Service, some of whom have not grappled with protected area issues—issues different from those of many of the other land management and species management areas. We need to make the Society known to these folks and welcome their contribution to our forums and conferences.

This is part and parcel of our efforts to make sure that we are inclusive when it comes to defining “parks and reserves.” (The alternative term used above, “protected area,” is admittedly awkward and imprecise, but it does have international currency.) Thus we have labored hard, especially over the past few years, to reach out to, and try to begin serving the needs of, people who work with the Forest Service’s research natural areas and wilderness areas, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s marine sanctuaries and national estuarine research reserves, the Environmental Protection Agency’s habitat cluster, the Bureau of Land Management, the various state park agencies, nongovernmental organizations, university departments, and so on—not to mention the Canadian Parks Service and a whole host of other organizations outside the USA. And all of this is in addition to our efforts to achieve a balance between natural resource and cultural resources interests in our publications and activities.

Much, of course, remains to be done on these fronts. Still, the Society has accomplished a lot that is worthwhile. Take, as an example, our (roughly) biennial conferences. When the GWS was established thirteen years ago, the thinking was that there was a need for a healthy, close relationship between and among park and reserve managers and those who perform the research necessary for resource management and interpretation. Prior to our founding, the Park Service co-sponsored, with the American Institute of Biological Sciences, two conferences, in 1976 and 1979, to bring researchers and managers together for week-long dialogues. Before that, several symposia at national conferences were held, including a symposium, “Research in the Parks,” held at the 1971 Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which celebrated the centennial of Yellowstone National Park.

The reason for these symposia and conferences, and the reason for GWS conferences and activities since then, has been to give researchers, managers, and in-

tepreters a forum to discuss common problems and potential solutions, and to bring all of them into closer contact—and hopefully understanding of one another's positions and problems. To a large extent we think these activities have been successful. There is always the danger that the efforts so far could become undone, however, making continued efforts imperative—a word we don't consider lightly.

The 7th conference, sponsored by GWS, and held last November in Jacksonville, Florida, was our best attempt yet to expand the meeting to include additional national and state/provincial agencies and organizations who oversee protected natural and cultural areas. Now, more than ever, a continued expansion must proceed, bringing NBS, NPS, and all the other organizations mentioned above into close contact and cooperation. We expect to do just that at the 8th conference in Portland, Oregon, the details of which will be announced soon.

If GWS can manage to do just one thing—develop continuity over the long-haul in the dialogue among the various agencies and organizations, among researchers, managers and interpreters, and ameliorate the inevitable vicissitudes in political agendas—we'll have performed a service worth the considerable effort it'll take.

Our Society honors the vision of George Wright, who made tremendous personal sacrifices 60 years ago to establish the first scientific programs in the Park Service. But we think that his primary interest was in promoting good research and sound management in the service of all parks and reserves, no matter what the administering agency. In terms of the biological sciences, the NBS has the potential to accomplish Wright's vision. We in the GWS will do whatever we can to help make the new agency a success.

Bob & Dave