

New Horizons for Cooperative Management and Collaborative Partnerships: Redwood National and State Parks, California, 1994–2010

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THE NEED FOR PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN NATIONAL PARKS, STATE PARKS, OTHER PUBLIC LANDS agencies, and tribal governments is becoming increasingly important as federal and state agencies see reductions in funding, and increased complexity in preserving the ecological integrity of park resources. Frequently, local residents and businesses, tribal members, environmentalists, and federal and state agencies are key stakeholders within these partnerships. In 1994 Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP) initiated a cooperative management strategy to identify, develop and implement operational efficiencies that would result in improved visitor services and enhanced resource protection. The move toward cooperative management at Redwood National Park was necessary due to its unique setting: it is carved out of private property fitted around three majestic state parks, and is vulnerable to upstream land uses. Since 1994, RNSP has become an important model of agency to agency partnerships that provided a greater capacity to manage park resources and serve park visitors.

In 1923, 1925, and 1939, California established Prairie Creek Redwoods, Del Norte Coast Redwoods, and Jedidiah Smith Redwoods State Parks, respectively. In 1968, Congress established a relatively small Redwood National Park. In 1978, Congress significantly expanded Redwood National Park and included the three state parks within the national park boundary with the express idea that the state would transfer its parks to the NPS. This initiated almost two decades of resentment, stress, and turmoil between the NPS, and state parks managers, employees, and supporters.

In 1992, newly appointed Director for California State Parks Donald Murphy became involved in the issue as he sought means to deal with a major state budget problem, due to declining general fund revenues. The California Coordinating Committee on Operational Efficiencies was established by Director Murphy, and they and then NPS Western Regional Director Stanley Albright objectively evaluated the management of these parks, as well as parks in San Francisco Bay and Malibu coast areas. This committee recommended a cooperative management agreement be developed that maintained existing ownership and management responsibilities, but that

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“aligned respective staff energies to focus on common goals and agendas to maximize their effectiveness.” The committee’s report also contained several very specific recommendations including changing the name of the individual state parks and Redwood National Park to “Redwood National and State Parks.” An initial agreement for the cooperative management of the parks was signed in May, 1994, followed by renewals of the agreement in 1999, 2002, and 2007. Most, but not all, of the recommendations have been implemented.

The partnership is generally regarded as a success, but has not been and is not without its detractors and difficulties. The following are some of the successes:

- Co-location of NPS and California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR) senior management staff.
- Legislative expansion of NPS park boundaries to include newly acquired state park lands to allow for sharing of resources.
- Passage of legislation providing Congressional authority for the NPS to “...acquire from and provide to the State of California, goods services ...”and to allow the assignment of a Federal or State employee to “...work in any Federal or State of California lands...”
- Development, approval, and implementation of a jointly prepared and approved General Management Plan/General Plan for RNSP including completion of both state and federal environmental compliance requirements.
- Co-location of a joint of NPS & California Department of Parks & Recreation (CDPR) maintenance facility with jointly funded, built on state lands transferred to the NPS.
- Joint use of NPS GIS capabilities for mapping and data management purposes.
- Implementation of a joint agency recycling and solid waste programs.
- CDPR and NPS staff has jointly prepared a park Trail Plan that links National and State Park trail systems based on plans in the joint GMP/GP.
- A joint sign plan has been developed and implemented which provides for use of the RNSP logo for most signs.
- Implemented protocols for agency sources and contracts for procurement of materials and supplies which resulted in significant cost savings.
- Implemented a jointly developed, common lock and key system for all administrative and visitor use facilities.
- New RNSP entrance, developed area, and trail signs, jointly fabricated and installed by staff of both agencies.
- Procurement and installation of a common VOIP telephone system and computer network.
- Installation of a joint solid waste collection and disposal operation that saves about \$20,000 per year.
- Trading and sharing of employees and services including NPS remodel of CDPR offices to accommodate NPS ranger staff, NPS carpentry and electrical work at CDPR Visitor Center, NPS remodeling work at CDPR historic Camp Lincoln residence. CDPR staff constructed a kitchen and comfort station and performed tree climbing, pruning and removal at NPS outdoor schools. Such work was accomplished under an agreement that produced significant savings since multiple contract change orders would have been necessary if a private contractor had been used.
- CDPR and NPS housing is used interchangeably by both required and non required occupancy employees of both agencies.
- Reduction by 40% of NPS propane gas costs at visitor and administrative facilities through use of a CDPR procurement contract.
- Sharing of CDPR and NPS storage facilities.

- All in-park training (i.e. chain saw operation, CPR/First Aid classes, etc.) is open to and frequently attended by both CDPR and NPS staff.

The character of and activities accomplished through the NPS/CDPR partnership have changed significantly from year to year. The initial phase was understandably devoted to developing support for the concept with agency staff. Over the last 16 years the parks have gone through a lot of trial and error, with a significant number of joint activities initiated and discontinued, or morphed into different arrangements, and subsequent efforts followed to form new joint operations. Personal relationships among the respective agency's management and supervisory staff plays a significant role in the level to which joint management actions are pursued and conducted. Consequently, transitions in the people filling these leadership positions have resulted in major changes in the character of the partnership over time.

In reviewing documents concerning the partnership, a list of "Lessons Learned" dating from a number of years ago was discovered, which seems just as relevant today as it was then.

Lessons learned—keys to a successful partnership

- Developing a successful and productive partnership is a major commitment that takes significant time and energy. Partnerships require care, feeding, and continuous work.
- Don't force things. There seems to be an incubation period for acceptance.
- Buy-in from employees is critical. Building the partnership from the ground up pays off.
- Build an identity early on, and with all employees. Use all employee meetings as a vehicle to build and strengthen the partnership.
- Develop a joint vision early on. Having a previously established and agreed-upon purpose is useful during times of disagreement, challenge, or stress, and can help realign direction and priorities when necessary.
- View the partnership as a means toward jointly accomplishing bigger, longer-range objectives, not as a goal or an end to itself; common visions, missions, and objectives help assure this.
- Partners, regardless of their respective capabilities or contributions to the partnership, should be considered equal when it comes to resolving issues related to the partnership and its mission.
- Achieving equality and trust between or among partners often requires burying individual and organizational egos, and giving up "control."
- Co-locating the key partner staff enhances partnership effectiveness and success, primarily because of closer and more frequent communications and interactions.
- The evolution of partnerships in a positive direction depends heavily on the creativity and motivation of key staff.
- The administrative framework upon which the partnership is built must provide sufficient flexibility and discretion for staff to explore and pursue a wide variety of options to achieve "success." Rigid guidelines and sideboards can constrain creativity, experimentation, and adaptive management.
- Having similar or closely aligned missions between partners enhances the opportunity for success. Even with closely aligned missions, however, be alert for challenges that can come from different agency methods and cultures.
- An often unintentional but nonetheless real and unrelenting force will tend to push personnel from both partners toward conformance and consistency with agency practices and policies even when this damages the partnership. This is especially true as vacancies occur and new employees come into the partnership agencies. Constant attention, effort, and correction are necessary just to maintain the status quo.

- As staffing changes, recruit and hire those who thrive in organizations and partnerships that are doing things outside the traditional realm.
- Reward those who “get it.” Joint projects developed by field staff indicate that the message is being received.
- Partners who start the relationship from scratch may have a stronger probability of success initially than partners who have coexisted for some time, and who bring a history that includes conflict or other baggage which takes time and effort to overcome.
- Partnerships ultimately succeed or fail because of the attitudes, energies, and relationships of the individuals involved, not the organizational relationships.