

## National Park Service-wide Emeritus Volunteer Program

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ON MONDAY, MARCH 30, 2015, I chose to attend the 10am-12pm session about “National Park Service-wide Emeritus Volunteer Program” which was presented by Lynne Murdock, the interpretive specialist from the National Park Service (NPS) out of Washington DC. When I arrived to the lecture, I sat down near the front and noticed that a gentleman by the name Bob Winfree from Alaska who is an ecologist in the NPS were the only ones present. I thought that more people would attend this lecture so I was disappointed, yet relieved because I knew that the discussion in the end of the lecture would go much easier. As the presentation began, I periodically took notes and paid close attention to the slides.

**Volunteers.** While listening to Lynne talk, I was intrigued by hearing a story of NPS volunteers who got angry when the NPS asked them to complete a background check, despite being a part of the NPS for a long period of time. They were insulted because they had been asked for a background check after years of diligent service. In response, the NPS created a new form for long-time volunteers that skipped the background check called USAccess application. Volunteers are the heart and soul of the NPS. Currently, most of the volunteers in the parks programs are aging retirees. There is a push to get younger and more youthful volunteers to bolster the volunteer programs that the NPS relies on. The reasons for this are younger volunteers will, hopefully, be able to give years of service, as well as influence others to join and help out. Another reason is that the aging retirees are starting to leave because of health reasons and unable to continue their excellent work. Monitoring where the retiree volunteers are located throughout the country is a current program, which helps the NPS target where they need to make pushes for new volunteers. In areas with a lot of retiring volunteers they can craft programs, which will draw a new generation of volunteers.

**National park emphasis programs.** The areas of emphasis of the national park programs that stood out to me were: State of the Parks, Cultural Resources, and Acoustical Monitoring. The State of the Parks was intriguing because it creates a picture of how healthy the parks are right now and what needs to be done to maintain, preserve, protect, and improve them for the future. Cultural Resources focuses on the resources provided by people and their cultures throughout the parks system such as Native American cultural heritage, history of important locations, as well as current cultures created by the national parks themselves. Acoustical Monitoring really struck me as interesting and important. Until hearing about it, I would never have thought about what

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role noise plays in a visit to a national park. It is fascinating that the parks system monitors as much noise as they can, from airplanes flying overhead, delivery trucks, tour busses, as well as wildlife. All these noises can impact the environment of a national park and, in one case highlighted, can help the NPS rediscover a thought to be extinct species. In this case, monitoring equipment used was able to identify the species of woodpecker and was surprised that it came from one thought to have been extinct.

### **Reflection**

As an avid visitor to the national parks, I learned more about how much the volunteers actually provide for the parks, how the whole NPS is responsible for so many different departments that make the national parks what they are. I also learned how what I, as a visitor or future volunteer, can do in order to maintain, preserve, protect, and improve parks for the future. This was the first professional conference I ever had the opportunity to attend, and even though I only had time to sit in on a single session, it was an experience that impacted the way I look at the national parks.