

# The National Park Service's Management Policy in the 21st Century

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## Introduction: Recommitting to Stewardship

**T**he papers in this issue of THE GEORGE WRIGHT FORUM were presented at a symposium which took place in 1997 at a meeting of The Wildlife Society. That symposium marked the second in a series of forums designed to open and engage constructive scientific input, discussion, and scholarly debate regarding National Park Service (NPS) policy, science, and values for the management of natural resources, including wildlife. The first forum, held at the Ecological Society of America meeting in 1996, centered on case histories that discussed wildlife management issues and the science and institutional policies that surrounded them. The publication of this second set of policy deliberations is timely. It comes as NPS is embarking on what Director Robert Stanton has called a "recommitment to the stewardship of the natural resources throughout the National Park System." NPS's "Natural Resource Challenge," the formal title of its recommitment effort, was announced in August 1999. It came in response to the publication of Richard West Sellars' *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (Yale University Press, 1997). In that book, Sellars reviewed much of the history of NPS's approach to wildlife, as well as other natural resources. The conclusion I find in Sellars' writing is that the National Park Service is exemplary in making park resources available to the visitor, and has some successes in restoring disturbed park environments, but has a long way to go in integrating science into park management.

In this symposium, a wide range of scientists continues an examination of one of NPS's most controversial management issues: the management policies for the regulation of wildlife (animal) populations. Such scientific examination supports a significant part of NPS's recommitment to natural resource stewardship. It encompasses both obtaining the scientific information to inform our policies and decisions, and engaging the as-

sistance of the greater scientific community in helping us meet the challenges of managing natural resources in the face of current and future complexities. This symposium represents both of those endeavors.

The idea of the symposium is to develop a dialogue on wildlife management that may offer a new and broader perspective in the area of NPS policy and wildlife management. Divergent scientific opinions on

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values, science, and policy on wildlife management are discussed. These opinions focus on the agency's management policy at the national level, and interpretation and implementation of national-level policies at the park level. They also focus on the need to interface wildlife management policy with other mandates, policies, and the underlying science relating to invertebrate species, vegetation, landscapes, human values, and the paleoenvironments from which they developed. The National Park

Service mission is to preserve the resources that visitors come to see. However, we have limited understanding or systematic measurement of how we are performing in the preservation of natural resources in parks, and we lack a systematic approach to accumulating, using, and translating an understanding of the resources we manage. This symposium will begin to provide a more systematic approach to understanding and managing our wildlife resources.

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