

Our State Parks

A volume of the THE GEORGE WRIGHT FORUM dedicated mainly to state parks is something of a departure from our usual concentration on national parks and other protected places whose scale is similar to that of a typical national park. A historical remembrance should be the first reason for concentrating on the state parks. As the president of the National Park Trust, Paul Pritchard, notes in the concluding article of "The State of State Parks," it was Stephen T. Mather who first used the term "our national system of parks." Paul reminds us that Mather said "that there would be no National Park System until there was a national system of parks." Indeed, Mather convened the first Conference on State Parks. This has been described in a previous FORUM article by Rebecca Conard ("The National Conference on State Parks: Reflections on Organizational Genealogy," Volume 14, Number 4).

More than a few of America's state parks could well be national parks. The most precious special value of the state parks in relation to the national parks is their ready accessibility. For example, in Maryland we say that "You are never more than 40 miles from a state park." And it is only half a day's drive from Assateague State Park's Atlantic beach to Swallow Falls State Park's mountain setting in Appalachia. That accessibility, it must be stressed, does not interfere with dedication to preservation in most state parks.

Our first two articles shed considerable light on two pairs of contending tendencies of both the national and the state parks. The first pair has to do with the much-labored issue of

preservation versus development. The second is concerned with natural versus cultural and historical resources.

State parks share the vision articulated so succinctly by Ethan Carr in the most recent issue of THE GEORGE WRIGHT FORUM. He wrote that the language of the National Park Service organic legislation, to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same" while leaving the parks "unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations" has often been described as "a dual mandate." He challenged the authenticity of the "dual mandate" by citing the vision of preservation and development "as

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indivisible parts of one undertaking" ("Park, Forest, and Wilderness," Volume 17, Number 2, p. 20).

That vision of indivisibility has been a fundamental force in the shaping and managing of the state parks no less than the national parks. While significant differences exist in the balance of preservation and development (and commercialization) of the state parks among the 50 states, one great commonality has been continuous efforts to adapt that vision from park to park and from time to time.

John Henneberger, who is well known to many readers of the FORUM through his substantial contributions to the work of the National Park Service, presents a deeply human-oriented analysis of "State Park Beginnings." In setting forth the details of personalities and beliefs, Henneberger makes clear the roots of the regularly made statements about a supposedly built-in contradiction in objectives. He concludes with a clearly stated recognition of the vision of indivisibility: "What is needed is a massive program comparable with that of the CCC era so that state parks can help meet the needs of the American public for outdoor recreation and the preservation of their natural and cultural heritage."

His closing words are an unplanned perfect linkage to Rebecca Conard's and Michael Carrier's analysis of integrating the second pair of contending tendencies in state park

management. That pair consists of protecting *natural areas* and protecting *cultural resources* (their italics). Managing each of the pair, readily divisible in this case, has been characterized by the authors as "intellectual dissonance." Overcoming the competition between the two great types of resources is becoming increasingly more visible in the national parks. Admittedly, the necessary teamwork is more difficult to achieve among state park organizations, in important part because of their differing authorizing laws. A major theme of the integration of philosophies and actions is that "human actions are a factor in ecological processes and in environmental change and that, at heart, environmental problems really are people problems." Public "understanding of the connections between human agency and environmental change" will foster "a greater sense of individual responsibility for environmental stewardship."

Susan Flader makes abundantly clear the critical need for "a statewide focus on the health and integrity of a state park system as a whole." She provides insights on the historical development of critically important citizen relationships with the Missouri State Park System and its administration. In providing support for the state parks, the Missouri citizen organization concentrated initially on the appropriate education of public officials as well as of citizens and on

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establishing an enduring financial base. Flader describes the problems and successes of attaining citizen support for dedicated taxes for state park purposes. It is her dedication to the very special value of "an alert, active citizenry" that sets her article apart from most statements about support of public parks.

With the thought that "partners are wonderful, while co-owners are dangerous," Rick Barton concludes a thoughtful analysis of the potential traps and unexpected control-oriented side effects of corporate sponsorship. Those sponsors can certainly provide fully constructive financial support and other benefits that accrue eventually to park visitors. On the other hand, if not carefully circumscribed, sponsors can unwisely interfere with park leadership initiatives. It is up to park managers to assess the risks and accept any necessary involvement constructively while guarding vigilantly and vigorously against sponsors extending their reach beyond support to influence management plans and actions.

Michael A. Reiter, James P. Eagleman, and Jenna Luckenbaugh present an emerging form of close cooperation between state parks and universities built upon experiential "service learning" relationships. University students would benefit from close hands-on experience with environmental and related subjects. The parks would benefit from the information that would be developed by

the work of involved students and by other contributions made in the planning and implementation of specific substantive projects. A major element of the kind of program set forth in the article is the matching of student interests and park management priorities. The article elaborates on the step-by-step details that take the program from concept to on-the-ground reality.

The final two articles in this series answer a question which might be put colloquially as, "How are things these days?" The first response, by Glen D. Alexander, deals mainly with highly macro-level trends that sweep across the states. He advises that the overall state of the state parks is "quite good." A particularly significant current trend is, in fact, really a revival and broadening of the establishment of state-level foundations. The Maryland foundation, for example, is 17 years old. In contrast, the nearby Pennsylvania foundation, modeled substantially on the Maryland experience, is less than a year old. The primary role of the state park foundation is very generally some kind of financial support to make up for, as much as possible, reductions in tax-supported revenues. Other add-on funds come from a variety of growing sources, including corporate partnerships of many kinds for many purposes.

The idea for the final article, by Paul Pritchard, arose on the very day that I was about to transmit the first

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six articles to the George Wright Society headquarters. I learned that the National Park Trust had just announced its second Legacy Report, this time focusing on state parks. Given the very special relevance of the report, we had to include a connection to it in this issue of the FORUM. In fairness to Paul, I suggested a very short article that would skim the cream of the Legacy Report, something that might be prepared overnight. And indeed, Paul did respond overnight. In contrast to the overall OK status described by

Glenn, Paul reports on two significant challenges confronting the state parks. The first is the lack of "real" government commitment to fund the parks consistent with their heavy visitation loads, present and prospective. The second is dealing with the "wall of sprawl" that is reaching the edge of too many parks. The article presents very summary statements about five needed actions, several well underway and several only recently underway, all very promising for the future of America's state parks.

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