

Collecting and Diffusing “the World’s Best Thought”: International Cooperation by the National Park Service

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ON OCTOBER 27, 1966, the National Park Service (NPS) announced that it would send a team of twelve specialists to Jordan to work with that country’s Tourism Authority and Antiquities Department. In cooperation with the Agency for International Development and under the guidance of the Park Service’s Division of International Affairs, the NPS personnel would spend two years providing site development plans for historical areas, training Jordanian park personnel, and coordinating Jordan’s developing national park and historic monuments system. According to National Park Service Director George Hartzog, “This is the first major international cooperative project the NPS has undertaken and is part of a continuing program to share experience and knowledge in park programs around the world.”¹

The “continuing program” noted by Director Hartzog was the Division of International Affairs, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2011 and which was established to manage and coordinate NPS interactions with foreign park and protected area agencies (Table 1). In the decades following its creation, the Office of International Affairs (OIA), as it is now known, has engaged the human and other resources of the Park Service to fulfill its complex international mission. In the words of former OIA Chief Robert C. Milne, this office “serves as the primary contact between the NPS and the world conservation community.”² Today, the OIA is NPS’s official arm for the evaluation and coordination of international programs, projects, and activities. Such interactions, however, did not begin with the OIA. Rather, they stretch back more than a century to before the creation of the National Park Service. In this article we aim to provide an overview of the principal agency-level interactions over the past century, situating them in the political and social evolution of American foreign relations as well as worldwide advances in science and conservation. In the space of this article, we cannot detail the outcomes of the many exchanges that occurred over the years. We can merely characterize the nature and intensity of interactions and recognize that in any specific instance the impact on the Park Service or a foreign agency may have been transformative, non-existent, or something between.

Before the creation of the Division of International Affairs, the NPS cooperated with overseas park systems on an *ad hoc* basis as situations and opportunities arose. At least as

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Table 1. International cooperative activities of the US National Park Service.

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- Disseminating information about US national parks
 - Collecting information about foreign protected areas
 - Assisting with foreign park planning, design, and technical development
 - Advising other US agencies
 - Coordinating visits to US parks by foreign officials
 - Training foreign park personnel
 - Providing representation at international conferences
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early as the first decade of the 20th century, the national parks began one of their most enduring international actions: the dissemination of information to foreign officials seeking to better manage their own protected areas. Requests occasionally came from park authorities in Japan, Switzerland, Germany, and elsewhere, but most often they arrived from Canada, which has always been the premier respondent in these exchanges. For instance, R.C. Campbell, Superintendent of Canada's Forestry Branch, wrote to his southern colleagues in January 1909 to obtain "information in connection with the administration of hot water springs in the National Parks." As would be typical of many such inquiries, Campbell sought assistance with a specific management issue: "the cost and character of bath houses." In particular, he wanted to know how many "people of both sexes ... can be accommodated at one time, and the extent to which they are patronized." Furthermore, he had the facilities of a particular park in mind. "This information," Campbell relayed, "would be particularly acceptable in connection with the Yellowstone."²³

Campbell's request came to rest on the desk of Frank Pierce, the first assistant secretary of the Interior Department, who mailed the forester a variety of superintendents' reports and "copies of the ... laws and regulations" relative to several national parks, including Yellowstone and Hot Springs. Despite the Canadian's specific interest, Pierce directed him to the Hot Springs report because, he informed Campbell, "No bath houses are maintained in the Yellowstone National Park."²⁴ This single exchange captures a feature common to many early professional inquiries—a misperception of America's national parks that had to be corrected in a reply. Great distances and limited communications tended to result in frequent misunderstandings about the nature and management of US national parks.

American park authorities did not, however, simply dispense information during these pre-Park Service years. Officials at Interior also used the mails to collect information that could assist them with their work. Most notable during this period were the exchanges between Clement Ucker, chief clerk of the Interior Department, and J.B. Harkin, the first Commissioner of Canada's new Dominion Parks Branch. Canada had created the world's first national park service in June 1911, and before the year was out, Harkin and Ucker were corresponding with each other. Harkin initially sought budgetary and other information on America's national parks, which Ucker rapidly provided. Ucker, for his part, hoped to learn more about the creation of Canada's national park system because in December 1911 the American Civic Association had begun what would ultimately be its successful drive for a US park system. In pursuit of his goal, Ucker wrote Harkin in December 1912 to obtain a copy

of the law creating Canada's park system and transcripts of the debates preceding the law's passage by parliament. A bill to create a "Bureau of National Parks" had been introduced in the US Congress and Ucker wanted "to obtain all available information on this topic."⁵ Harkin mailed Ucker everything he had requested and wished his efforts well.⁶ Congress did not pass the 1912 bill, but the effort to create a US park system continued unabated and in 1916 resulted in the creation of the National Park Service.

In the aftermath of this success, the valuable support of an international partner was not forgotten by the Park Service's new leaders. In a May 13, 1918, letter to Director Stephen Mather, Interior Secretary Franklin K. Lane specifically linked the new service's mission to international cooperation. "You should," ordered Lane, "keep informed of park movements and park progress, municipal, county and State, both at home and abroad, for the purpose of adapting, whenever practicable, the world's best thought to the needs of the national parks."⁷ In accordance with Lane's directive, NPS collected information about the size, scope, use, and management of foreign protected areas, especially those in Canada and other English-speaking countries. Nevertheless, NPS's approach through the 1940s remained relatively casual, relying largely on what they could collect through correspondence, publications, research reports from the Carnegie Foundation, and the cooperation of State Department employees stationed overseas.⁸

During these early decades, the Park Service occasionally assisted a foreign agency with the planning, design, and technical development of a protected area, but as demonstrated by the case of Tongariro National Park, it did so at a distance rather than on-site. In spring 1923, a park board was appointed "to control and develop" this New Zealand park. As an initial move, J.B. Thompson, undersecretary for lands, wrote to Director Mather for assistance with two construction matters: "the erection of a Caretakers cottage and of a large hostel to accommodate visitors." Thompson knew that NPS had constructed many ranger residences so he requested any plans that would enable his staff to build a structure "in harmony with the surroundings." The hotel, Johnson relayed, was proposed to be a private venture so he would be grateful to know if NPS allowed nongovernmental facilities in its parks. Even if it did not allow private hotels, a "sketch or plan of a [national park hotel] would also be appreciated." One month later, Mather cheerfully informed Thompson that the Park Service was "very glad to give you every assistance." They mailed Thompson the plans for a standard ranger station, copies of the contracts signed between the Yellowstone Park Hotels company and the Department of the Interior "for the erection, operation, and maintenance of hotels," a report on how the Landscape Engineering and Civil Engineering divisions studied and criticized private plans before approval, and photographs of some existing park hotels. No one from the Park Service, however, traveled to New Zealand to assist.⁹

The cultural comfort afforded by a common language made it easy to assist other English-speaking countries in their efforts to design and manage protected areas, but traditional US foreign policy shaped contacts with other countries. The United States had regarded Latin America as its "neighborhood" since the early 19th century, and so it naturally paid attention to park developments in those countries. On October 10, 1940, the US signed the Convention on Nature Protection and Wildlife Preservation in the Western Hemisphere with 17 South and Central American countries, including Mexico, Cuba, Brazil, and Argentina.¹⁰

After World War II, the Park Service continued its earlier international practices, but it committed more resources and initiated three new activities. First, during the summer of 1948, the Park Service made available the services of Charles A. Richey, assistant chief of the Lands Division, to another US agency: the Army's Civil Information and Education Division in Japan. The American occupation forces had requested that Richey be sent on a three-month detail to Japan to advise them and the "appropriate Japanese agencies as to details of organization, equipment and planning for the thirteen National Parks of Japan; in cooperation with officials of [the Army], to hold conferences with officials of the Japanese Government, and to inspect National Parks with a view toward their organization along centralized national lines for the public benefit."¹¹ Richey traveled extensively through Japan's national parks from May to August 1948 and his report recommended comprehensive changes in administration, funding, resource utilization, wildlife protection, physical development, and expansion of the system.

Second, two years later, and for the first time, the Park Service coordinated a lengthy visit to US parks by a foreign official. Overseas park officials and advocates had been visiting US national parks for decades, but usually they had done so with little if any accommodation by NPS. For instance, when Kojiro Sano, secretary of the Unzen Prefectural Park in Japan, visited US national parks in 1928, the Park Service provided no formal assistance to him.¹² In 1950, however, this approach changed. Mervyn Cowie, the director of the Royal National Parks of Kenya, visited US national parks for two months during the summer and much of his travel was planned by Park Service personnel. Moreover, they arranged lodging and in-park tours for him, contacted the State Department for funds to underwrite his trip, and informed local newspapers when this celebrity would be available for interviews (Figure 1).

Almost one year after Cowie toured the American parks, NPS added a third new international-affairs activity when it took initial steps to train foreign park managers and personnel, which on this occasion, occurred overseas. In January 1950, A.E. Trollip, chairman of South Africa's National Parks Board of Trustees, asked NPS Director Newton Drury if Victor Cahalane, the Park Service's chief biologist, could visit South Africa to help his agency establish a "wildlife management program" in the parks (Figure 2). Such a visit, Trollip declared, would be "of mutual benefit and we are sincerely hoping that you will see your way clear to approve of

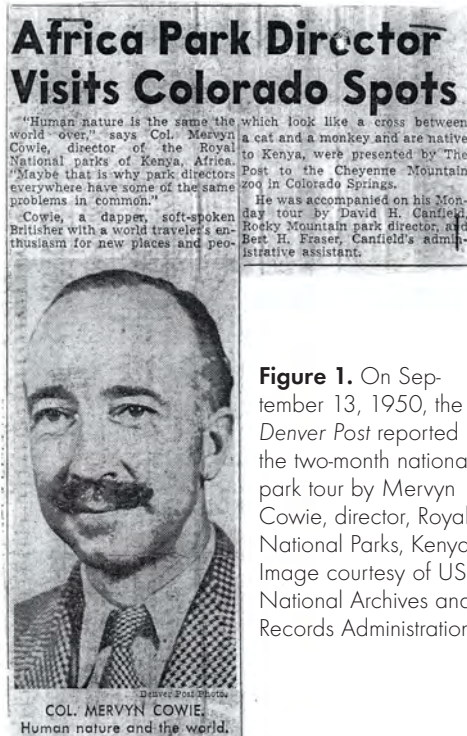


Figure 1. On September 13, 1950, the *Denver Post* reported the two-month national park tour by Mervyn Cowie, director, Royal National Parks, Kenya. Image courtesy of US National Archives and Records Administration.

it.”¹³ Drury replied that he would be pleased to let Cahalane provide training and program development, but only if outside funding could be secured. According to the historian Richard West Sellars, Drury was timid about approaching Congress for their support of NPS science.¹⁴ After lobbying and applications by Drury, Cahalane, and the National Parks Board of Trustees, the Carnegie Foundation provided a grant to underwrite this effort and Cahalane spent November 1950 through February 1951 training South Africans in the management of large wildlife species.¹⁵ On his return, Cahalane traveled north through Africa, including a stop in Kenya where he was hosted by Mervyn Cowie, and then through Europe to learn more about how the parks in these regions managed people–environment interactions.

World War II fundamentally reshaped political events and national roles in both the US and the world, with the United Nations recasting international cooperation and dialogue. An



Figure 2. Victor Cahalane, USNPS Wild Life Division. Photo by Allen Reinhart, courtesy of US Department of the Interior, National Park Service Historic Photograph Collection, Harpers Ferry Center.

arm of that supranational organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) facilitated the exchange of ideas and expertise in many areas, among them conservation and wildlife protection. In 1948, UNESCO established the International Union for the Protection of Nature, later renamed the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), which serves today as the primary international organization monitoring protected areas around the world and facilitating the exchange of management data.¹⁶

The war itself cast the United States into a leadership role as the least damaged and most powerful country in the world. At the onset of the Cold War, the Marshall Plan, as well as other events, convinced the American public and its

lawmakers that a bold US international role was paramount. In 1948, Congress authorized the Department of State to communicate directly with the peoples of foreign countries and to help its allies and poorer nations to recover or develop, but it was President Harry Truman who cemented the new international role of America in his 1949 inaugural address, also known as the “Four Point Speech.”¹⁷ Speaking to Americans and the world, Truman made it clear that he intended to continue and enhance America’s international involvement beyond the immediate post-war period. In the fourth foreign policy objective identified in the speech, Truman called for the US to share its “know-how” with other nations through technical assistance programs. “We must,” the president insisted, “embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.”¹⁸ In short order the “Point Four” program was launched. During the 1950s this emphasis on foreign assistance accelerated culminating in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, which created the US Agency for Inter-

national Development (USAID). Soon USAID would become one of the primary sources of funding for the National Park Service's international projects.¹⁹

Enhanced international activity by the National Park Service did not begin until 1960 when Director Conrad Wirth expressed his support for an international affairs office.²⁰ Two years earlier the director had attended the 6th general assembly of IUCN in Athens, Greece, where he was appointed to the International Commission on National Parks.²¹ On May 17, 1961, Director Wirth asked his senior leadership to establish an office to coordinate the "aggressive interest on the part of this service [NPS] in the international park movement," and to appoint Dr. George Ruhle to head it.²² In response, Ben Thompson, chief of the Division of Recreation Resource Planning, tendered a list of recommendations for the new office, chief among them an immediate meeting with the "State Department and International Cooperation Administration [predecessor to USAID] representatives to explain the nature and scope of our work and explore all possible assistance from them, including financial assistance for fiscal year 1962."²³ The following October the new "Division" of International Affairs began its work.

According to a July 1961 press release, the Park Service would, through its new division, provide training and technical assistance on national parks and related activities to new and underdeveloped nations, scientific cooperation and professional consultation to countries having advanced park programs, and representation at international conventions, such as the First World National Parks Conference, to be held in Seattle in July 1962. In addition, the new division would work with other federal agencies, UN bodies such as UNESCO; and such international agencies as IUCN.²⁴ With the exception of representation at international meetings, the duties listed in this press release were more or less well established within the agency, but not in any one office. Once the Division of International Affairs was launched in October 1961, the Park Service quickly experienced a marked increase in the frequency and scale its interactions with foreign park agencies. In the mid-1980s, the division was renamed the Office of International Affairs (OIA).

In an article of this length we cannot comprehensively recount the OIA's interactions over the last 50 years, which are similar to what went before though much more extensive, but simply illustrate the change in degree. As noted at the beginning of this article, in the mid-1960s the Park Service began to send large teams of technical specialists overseas, beginning with the country of Jordan. Most technical teams quietly assisted their host-colleagues, but the team that assisted Jordan's park agencies had been there for only eight months of a two-year assignment when, dramatically, it was caught up in the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967. For a time, it was feared that NPS personnel may have been killed, but luckily all escaped unharmed. Despite this setback, the Park Service was able to assist Jordan in 1968 with a comprehensive, technical plan for the development and management of Amman's historic sites (Figure 3). Over the next several decades, such efforts expanded and NPS personnel produced a wide array of administrative, technical, and design reports for the park agencies of Bulgaria, China, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Kenya, Morocco, Panama, Saudi Arabia, Tanzania, Tunisia, Turkey, Venezuela, and elsewhere.²⁵

Another activity that increased sharply after the creation of the OIA was the training of foreign park managers and personnel, which quietly began with the African Student Summer

Program of 1961. A collaboration with the African-American Institute and the African Wildlife Leadership Foundation, this NPS program provided a small group of African college students who were studying in the US and who wished to become park personnel in their home countries with an opportunity to attend conservation training at Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. As years passed, the program expanded to provide broad training in park design and administration, including wildlife, visitor, and infrastructure issues.²⁶ In 1965, a complementary, but more focused “short course” on park administration was launched by NPS, Canada’s park service (now known as Parks Canada), and the University of Michigan (Figure 4). Unlike the African student program, the short course began with one week of intensive study at the Ann Arbor campus, followed by 12 days at a variety of US and Canadian national parks. Moreover, it was offered not to African college students, but to the “executives and administrators” of parks “throughout the world.”²⁷ These administrative short courses (later “seminars”) continued annually into the late 1980s, but the number of applications was decreasing by 1987 as the market for high-level administrators reached saturation. Subsequently, the seminars were changed in format in order to focus on specific environments, such as arid lands, and aimed at mid-level staffers. Nevertheless, these annual preparatory courses soon ceased, to be followed by the occasional, more specialized training program aimed, for instance, at a specific foreign country’s park personnel or at new park superintendents in NPS and abroad.²⁸

In recent years other duties have added to the workload of the OIA, with much of the effort involving the coordination of an expanding array of international contacts and programs. For example, OIA personnel direct US participation in the World Heritage Convention particularly assisting in the nomination of

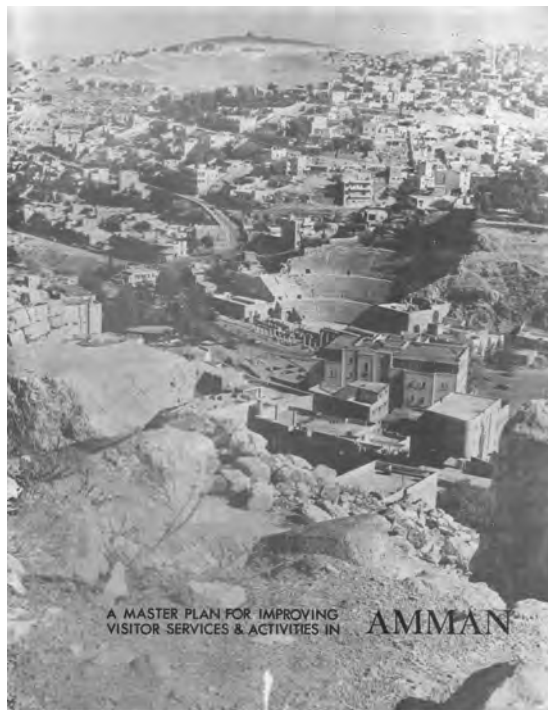


Figure 3. The NPS-produced master plan for Historic Amman, Jordan (1968).

Figure 4. Brochure announcing the first short course on “Administration of National Parks & Equivalent Reserves.”



new sites as well as the monitoring of the existing 21 American sites on the world list. As NPS's international face, OIA also participates in IUCN activities, international scientific and historic preservation meetings and data exchanges, and assists the Department of State, USAID, and the Peace Corps in maintaining US treaty obligations and initiatives. One staff member coordinates an International Volunteers in Parks program that brings more than 100 foreign students and young resource management professionals to work and learn in US parks each year. This is in addition to the 200 to 300 official foreign visitors and dignitaries whose activities and arrangements are planned and managed by the OIA. Another rapidly growing program that OIA oversees is the Sister Parks Program, which at the time of this writing fosters relationships between American parks and 39 foreign protected areas in 18 countries. Finally, OIA reviews and processes travel paperwork for NPS employees involved in international park projects and visits. Recently some of these trips have been undertaken to search for data and a fuller understanding of the natural and historical resources in NPS units. In following Secretary Lane's admonition to seek "the world's best thought" on managing parks as well as historical and scientific data pertinent to managing and interpreting NPS resources, America's national parks are improved.²⁹

Endnotes

1. "National Park Service Sending Twelve Consultants to Jordan for Development of Tourism and Parks," press release, October 27, 1966, 2; in "L66, Foreign Parks, Jordan," Box 61, Appendix 21, RG 79, Records of the National Park Service, US National Archives, College Park, MD (hereafter RG 79).
2. Robert C. Milne, "Beyond U.S. Borders: A Commitment to Cooperation." *CRM Bulletin* 10 (special issue, 1987): 26.
3. Letter of R.H. Campbell to C. Hart Merriam, January 20, 1909; in "0-30, Pt 1 General, Foreign Parks, Canada," Box 630, RG 79.
4. Letter of Frank Pierce to R.H. Campbell, March 24, 1909; in "0-30, Pt 1 General, Foreign Parks, Canada," Box 630, RG 79.
5. Letter of Clement S. Ucker to J.B. Harkin, December 19, 1912, "0-30, Pt 1 General, Foreign Parks, Canada," Box 630, RG 79.
6. Ucker to Harkin, December 19, 1912; Harkin to Ucker, 20 January 1913; in "0-30, Pt 1 General, Foreign Parks, Canada," Box 630, RG 79.
7. Letter of Franklin K. Lane to Stephen T. Mather, May 13, 1918; reproduced in Lary M. Dilsaver, ed., *America's National Park System: the Critical Documents* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), 51.
8. See, for example, letter of A.E. Demaray to J.B. Harkin, April 10, 1929, in "0-30 Foreign Parks, Canada (Parts 1-2), 1909-32," Box 630, Appendix 2, RG 79; "Mount Olympus May Become a Grecian Park," *Stockton [California] Record*, April 6, 1929; H.M. Hall, "European Reservations for the Protection of Natural Conditions," *Journal of Forestry* 27, no. 6 (1929): 667-684, in "0-30 Foreign Parks, Miscellaneous, ca. 1914-32," Box 629, Appendix 2, RG 79; and letter of H.C. Bryant to Theodore G. Ahrens, March 25, 1933, in "0-30 Foreign Parks, Germany, 1910-30," Box 630, Appendix 2, RG 79.

9. Letter of J.B. Thompson to Director, March 29, 1923; letter of Stephen T. Mather to J.B. Thompson, April 30, 1923; and letter of Arno B. Cammerer to D.R. Hull, April 30, 1923, all in “0-30 Foreign Parks, New Zealand, 1916–32,” Box 631, Appendix 2, RG 79.
10. The Convention on Nature Prevention and Wildlife Preservation in the Western Hemisphere was adopted by the United States and 17 other countries in Washington, DC, on October 12, 1940. Congress ratified the treaty on April 15, 1941 (56 Stat. 1354, TS981) and it entered into force on May 1, 1942. In addition to the four mentioned in the text above and the US, signatory countries included Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. In later years Panama, Paraguay, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago also joined. US Fish and Wildlife Service, “Digest of Federal Resource Laws of Interest to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,” <http://www.fws.gov/laws/lawsdigest/treaty.html> (Western Hemisphere Convention), accessed August 20, 2011; Organization of American States, Department of International Law, “Multilateral Treaties,” <http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/signs/c-8.html>, accessed August 20, 2011.
11. Letter of Kenneth C. Royall to Secretary of the Interior, February 26, 1948; in “0-30 Proposed Foreign Parks, Japan, 1933–49,” Box 2917, Appendix 2, RG 79.
12. Letter of Henry B. Hitchcock to Secretary of State, November 26, 1928; in “0-30 Foreign Parks, Japan, 1911–32,” Box 631, Appendix 2, RG 79.
13. Letter of A.E. Trollip to Newton Drury, January 26, 1950; in “L66, Foreign Parks and Historic Sites, Africa, 1961–69,” Box 2171, Appendix 3, RG 79; Letter of Hillory A. Tolson to Drury, September 8, 1950; in “L66, Foreign Parks and Historic Sites, Africa, 1961–69,” Box 2171, Appendix 3, RG 79.
14. Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 166.
15. Victor H. Cahalane, “A Report to the National Parks Board of Trustees of South Africa,” Washington, DC, 1951; in “L66, Foreign Parks and Historic Sites, Africa, 1961–69,” Box 2171, Appendix 3, RG 79.
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19. The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, P.L. 87-195, 75 Stat. 424.

20. Letter of Conrad L. Wirth to Secretary of State, June 20, 1960, "L66, Foreign Parks and Historic Sites, Cooperation with Foreign Agencies, 1958-1963," Box 2170, Appendix 3, RG 79.
21. Letter of Harold Coolidge to Conrad Wirth, November 13, 1963, "A2415, International Union, Pt.1 From 1-1-62," Box 56, Appendix 3, RG 79.
22. Letter of Conrad Wirth to Messrs. Tolson, Thompson, Beard, and Ruhle, March 17, 1961, Box 2170; in "L66, Cooperation with Foreign Agencies 1-1-60," Box 2170, Appendix 3, RG 79.
23. Letter of Ben H. Thompson to Director [Conrad Wirth], April 21, 1961; in "L66, Cooperation with Foreign Agencies 1-1-60," Box 2170, Appendix 3, RG 79.
24. Hillory A. Tolson, press release of July 11, 1961; in "L66, Cooperation with Foreign Agencies 1-1-60," Box 2170, Appendix 3, RG 79.
25. Letter of Raymond L. Freeman to Mr. [George] Hartzog, June 12, 1967; in "L66, Foreign Parks and Historic Sites, Jordan, 1965-66," Box 61, Appendix 21, RG 79 ; John W. Bright and Raymond Freeman. "International Technical Assistance: NPS Landscape Architects Abroad," *CRM Bulletin* 10 (special issue,1987): 5.
26. Letter of Myron D. Sutton to Neil Phillips, September 14, 1964, p. 2 of attachment; in "L66, Foreign Parks and Historic Sites, Washington Office, 1964-69," Box 2170, Appendix 3, RG 79; "African Leaders Program in Yellowstone National Park," unpublished paper, 1962; in Jim Charlton Papers, Library, Office of International Affairs, National Park Service, Washington DC.
27. Quotes from inside of brochure, "A Short Course, Administration of National Parks and Equivalent Reserves, May 10-29, 1965," National Park Service, Washington, DC.
28. David Reynolds, presentation on history of NPS short courses, George Wright Society Conference on Parks, Protected Areas, and Cultural Sites, March 14, 2011, New Orleans, LA; E-mail of James K. Bellamy to Mike Soukup, "The New Superintendent Course," December 10, 1997, in Library, Office of International Affairs, National Park Service, Washington DC.
29. National Park Service, Office of International Affairs, <http://www.nps.gov/oia/>, accessed October 7, 2011.

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