

NPS–USGS Collaboration to Support Science and Resource Management in the National Parks

Vincent L. Santucci, guest editor

Introduction

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IN 2016, THE US NATIONAL PARK SERVICE (NPS) will celebrate the agency's centennial and one hundred years of resource stewardship and public service in the parks. Throughout this history, the mission of the bureau as defined in the National Park Service Organic Act (1916) has endured and flourished into a system of parks and protected areas across the American landscape. The management strategies and practices implemented for and in the parks have undergone some evolution and maturation based upon new laws, advancing technology, and a wide variety of changing social, political, economic, and environmental priorities.

In order to effectively meet the demands of a growing park system and the expanding public use of the parks, NPS ventured into public and private partnerships, recognized the benefits of philanthropy and volunteerism, and engaged in opportunities for scientific collaboration. The need to integrate more science into park planning and decision-making was becoming increasingly more apparent and is well chronicled by NPS historian Richard West Sellars in his book *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (Sellars 1997). The need for science in park management is clearly evident today in the attempts to understand the impacts of climate change on parks, protecting air and water resources, and evaluating the health of marine and terrestrial ecosystems. NPS is not working alone on these critical science issues and collaborates with many other government agencies, scientific institutions and organizations, and other groups to understand and address them.

The US Geological Survey (USGS) is one of the principal entities collaborating with NPS on scientific issues. A few examples of NPS–USGS collaboration are presented in this special issue of *The George Wright Forum*. The science-focused mission of USGS supporting the diverse needs of the Department of Interior bureaus is reflected in the 2010 USGS Science Strategy. The new USGS organization is aligned into seven mission areas that provide

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the professional support and capacity to address the science needs of the nation and Department of the Interior agencies.

The historical relationship between NPS and USGS is well documented in the administrative histories for both bureaus. These agency connections were initially forged during the post-Civil War era before either USGS or NPS were established as federal bureaus. The government's interest in the resources of the American West led the Department of Interior to embark on four great geological and geographical surveys of the western territories in 1869. One survey, led by Ferdinand V. Hayden into the Yellowstone area, compiled information, photographs, and paintings which soon inspired the American people and Congress to establish Yellowstone National Park on March 1, 1872. After USGS was established in 1879, mappers and scientists conducted work in the early parks that were established prior to the creation of the National Park Service in 1916 (Rabbitt 1989).

Today, collaboration between NPS and USGS involves hundreds of science and resource management projects in the parks. Collectively, this collaboration helps to inform managers and the public about the condition of park resources and the science needed to support informed decision-making. The interagency cooperation and sharing of new and state-of-the-art technologies have enabled evaluation and study of parks and their resources that could never be contemplated when NPS was founded in 1916.

We dedicate this special issue of *The George Wright Forum* to all NPS and USGS employees who have recognized and fostered interagency collaboration, which supports the highest levels of science and stewardship in the management of our national parks.

References

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Vincent L. Santucci, National Park Service, Geologic Resources Division, 1201 I Street NW, Washington, DC 20005; vincent_santucci@nps.gov