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**Resource stewardship—rebuilding a house divided:
the Pacific West Region’s resource stewardship
strategy for 2000 and beyond**

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An overview

Much has been written about the need to better care for resources in the U.S. national parks. The Leopold Report, the Vail Agenda, reports from the Government Accounting Office, the Pacific West Region’s white paper “The Resource Protection Dilemma,” and NPS Historian Richard West Sellars’ recent book *Preserving Nature in the National Parks* all point out the shortfalls in the Park Service’s resource protection and management programs.

The NPS strategic plan lists resource preservation as the first of four goals toward which we are striving. “Easy access has created a complicated challenge: how to adequately protect and preserve park ... resources while providing safe and enjoyable experiences for the public and visitors. Easy access and commercially desirable resources, combined with a limited ranger force, have resulted in increased resource crimes, including poaching, archeological theft and grave robbing, which often go undetected until too late.... The National Park Service must strive to further protect and preserve our nation’s natural and cultural resources. Public support of all environmental and cultural laws must be reflected in budget and staffing allocations” (p. 45).

NPS continues to have great difficulty addressing the burgeoning resource protection dilemma that includes commercialized plant and wildlife poaching, archaeological resource theft, paleontological and geologic resource theft, and other environmental crimes. The reasons for this apparent inability to protect the park resources are varied. Visitation to NPS areas has grown so rapidly over the last twenty years that park protection staffs have been hard-pressed to deal with the increasing law enforcement and emergency service demands. NPS supervisors and managers have placed higher priority on quality emergency services. Consequently, attention to the protection of resources became something that was done when rangers weren’t busy caring for, or dealing with, visitors.

Increased demands for natural resources have further compounded the situation. Rapid human population growth, especially in Third World countries, created increased demand for animal parts and plants for medicinal and aphrodisiac purposes. This one aspect alone has focused profit-driven poachers on national parks, where they take bears, ungulates, and various plants to supply a burgeoning black market. In addition, trophy hunting and worldwide demand for archaeological, paleontological, and cultural artifacts have added huge incentives for criminals to exploit park resources. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates the illegal wildlife trade in the USA to be second only to the illegal drug trade.

Over the last fifteen years, NPS has responded to the increase in resource management complexity through various initiatives that have created a specialized pool of employees whose primary responsibility is resource management. In the wake of this specialization, the role of the protection ranger became unclear. Eventually rangers became more and more like public safety officers and emergency service providers, and their resource management and resource protection skills waned. Also during this time, a schism began to develop between rangers and resource management staffs that tended to alienate the two groups from one another, with neither fully appreciating the work of the other.

We now understand that resource management and resource protection are equally important elements to effective resource stewardship. NPS is mandated by law to preserve resources for the enjoyment of present and future generations. It is an awesome, and, at times, conflicting task, but according to agency policy, recent court decisions, and the NPS director's stated priorities, NPS must assure the protection of the resources entrusted to it as "the" highest priority.

The recently implemented Natural Resource Challenge (NRC) calls for revising the resource management planning process to better integrate it into general park planning, and for involving all park divisions in its development. Techniques are to be developed and employed that protect the inherent qualities of national parks and restore natural systems that have been degraded. Collaboration is necessary with the public and private sectors to minimize degradation. One of the challenges in the NRC is to *protect* native species and their habitats. There are many opportunities for resource managers, protection rangers, and all park employees to work collaboratively on such projects as non-native species control or carrying out the provisions of threatened and endangered species recovery plans.

Another NRC section challenges NPS to provide leadership for a healthy environment, including air and water resource protection where joint planning can be conducted for hazardous materials spill response, monitoring, detection, and mitigation of pollution sources. Finally, the NRC indicates that the "foundations of stewardship" will ensure that professional development programs for resource managers, rangers, and park managers will be strengthened, and will also be expanded to ensure that all employees have adequate understanding of park resources to contribute effectively to the mission.

Resource protection is the responsibility of every NPS employee, not just the resource management specialist or the protection ranger. All employees need to be given clear direction about the importance of their roles as resource protectors.

Integrated strategies to improve the protection of NPS resources need to be developed under the tenets of "resource stewardship." For the purposes of these strategies, "resource stewardship" is defined as the collective efforts of all park divisions to preserve, protect, maintain, restore, and understand park resources. This integration and synthesis of work by all park employees should result in greater preservation of resources in perpetuity. Under this tenet, other disciplines can easily assume their role and place of importance to make NPS a better resource steward.

Collaboration is the key in developing resource protection strategies at all levels of the organization from the park through upper-level management in regional and Washington offices. Park resource management plans and other site-specific plans

must reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the work that needs to be done to protect resources. Regional management must make superintendents and members of the regional directorate understand this expectation and communicate the importance of protecting resources. Key regional staffers, along with their various advisory councils, must take a look at the strategies on the following pages and begin to set up systems that reward interdisciplinary thinking, planning, and implementation. Washington personnel must set the tone and example and lead the way to improvement through collaborative efforts.

There are numerous examples popping up throughout the Pacific West Region of successful resource protection efforts. Pacific West Region is already influencing NPS policy in the resource protection and stewardship arena. A few of these examples follow.

- The strategy report was prepared by an interdisciplinary group of resource and protection managers.
- The Northern California–Southern Oregon Subcluster resource protection strike team is currently in its third season and is enhancing the resource protection efforts in their areas. This focused, specially trained and equipped group of rangers from four parks has been utilized on a variety of challenging resource protection issues.
- Various advisory councils meet with each other, plan joint conferences, and update one another on an ongoing basis.
- An interdisciplinary resource protection course was put on in the fall of 1999. Students and instructors from a variety of disciplines, including natural and cultural resource managers, protection rangers, public affairs officers, and hazardous materials coordinators, trained with assistant U.S. Attorneys in a team-building learning environment. This course received rave reviews by all attendees.
- The ranger advisory council generated a white paper on resource protection shortfalls and called for an integrated approach to address the problem.
- Several parks report recently receiving substantial base-funding increases as a result of developing interdisciplinary, resource-related project proposals.
- The Pacific–Great Basin Support Office protection leader and Joshua Tree National Park chief ranger participated in the development of national protection ranger competencies, ensuring that resource protection was a major requirement for protection rangers. They also supported requiring resource protection and stewardship training of all employees.
- When reviewing the draft NPS management policies, the Pacific West Region strongly recommended that a dedicated resource protection chapter be developed.
- Numerous Pacific West Region chief rangers participated in the development of the Thomas Report, a report to Congress on the NPS Law Enforcement Program. Identified in the report was the NPS' inability to adequately protect natural and cultural resources; the majority of the recommendations identify what is needed to improve resource protection capabilities.

There is a growing awareness throughout the region and Servicewide that NPS is failing in its resource protection mandate. The product of this working group is an effort to encourage “more and better” resource protection efforts which cross disciplines. Coming to similar conclusions, several other regions are developing resource protection strategies as well.

The observation of William B. Morse of The Wildlife Management Institute nearly three decades ago remains valid in the new millennium:

Too often, enforcement is looked upon as a necessary evil, even as an anachronism that must be accepted simply because it exists. Nothing can be further from

the truth. Without adequate law enforcement, the finest research and management will have little or no effect in protecting the resources. Scientist and manager alike must realize that wildlife (and this could also be said for other resources as well) depends on three-way teamwork, and must help give enforcement the stature and tools it needs to operate. Enforcement officers tend to feel alienated to some degree because they are not always considered essential or professional. If law enforcement is to meet present, let alone future needs, it must receive administrative interest commensurate with ... its importance as a member of ... the team.

The recommendations in the full report lay out a wide range of strategies to allow the Pacific West Region to continue to improve its efforts at resource protection. By adopting them we can continue to lead by example. The work has only begun....

Summary

Resource protection is being forgotten. No one division or group seems to consider it as a core responsibility. Rangers are busy dealing with visitor service and emergency response issues while resource managers often tend to focus on understanding and restoring ecosystems. In the meantime, precious resources are being poached, commercialized, stolen and destroyed.

In this paper a variety of methods have been identified to rejuvenate resource protection while continuing to build and enhance other new and vital areas of emphasis. While the need for increased funding for specific resource protection functions is evident, significant progress is possible by changing the agency's culture from within, without necessarily waiting for additional funding.

Hiring the right people as protection rangers and resource managers may be the single most important action that can be taken to improve resource protection. Hiring rangers whose training and ability is limited to emergency services, or resource managers in key positions who are unable to view management outside their own areas of expertise, has contributed to the present dilemma. Personnel with cultural and natural science education, training, and experiences that are capable, and willing, to perform as members of interdisciplinary teams, should be the focus of recruitment and hiring.

The discussion on training suggests integrating resource protection in all orientation courses, resource management training, law enforcement refreshers, etc. The resource protection strategy team felt it is especially important that the basic law enforcement for land management agencies curriculum at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center once again include a major emphasis on resource protection.

Collaboration on planning at all levels of NPS is critical to developing and implementing resource protection strategies. At the park level, from the general management plan through preparation of annual work plans, resource protection issues and strategies must be specifically identified and integrated. Effective resources management should integrate science, management, and protection.

Interdisciplinary plans, implemented by well-trained and well-informed employees at all levels of the organization, will ensure park resources are available for present and future generations to enjoy.

Note: This paper is only an excerpt of the introductory sections of the strategy report. A complete copy of the document may be downloaded from http://www.redw.nps.gov/pro/pwr_resource_strategies.doc. The recommendations in this paper are the result of an interdisciplinary working group appointed by the National Park Service (NPS) Pacific West Region's natural resources advisory council and ranger advisory council. The work is in response to Regional Director John Reynolds' charge to these councils to develop strategies to improve the resource protection efforts within the Pacific West Region. A resource protection strategy team, comprising the authors, was created.