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MEETING DEMANDS

Staffing, funding, professionalization, and reorganization all had broad implications for natural resource stewardship in 1996. Funds for natural resource stewardship continued to slide for the second year in a row while personnel and operating costs rose. Restructuring mostly behind us, we discovered some improvements in administrative operations, but the ever-evolving nature of this reorganization has led to communication challenges and many different approaches to implementing policy and carrying out natural resource programs. Despite these problems, we made some progress in the high priority area of professionalization, achieving an increase in the number of professional natural resource managers working in parks and realizing a significant in-house training opportunity for new resource managers. But given the complexity of natural resource problems and the pace at which they develop, is this enough?

Funding and staffing

Looking back on the budget; looking out for the future

by Abigail Miller

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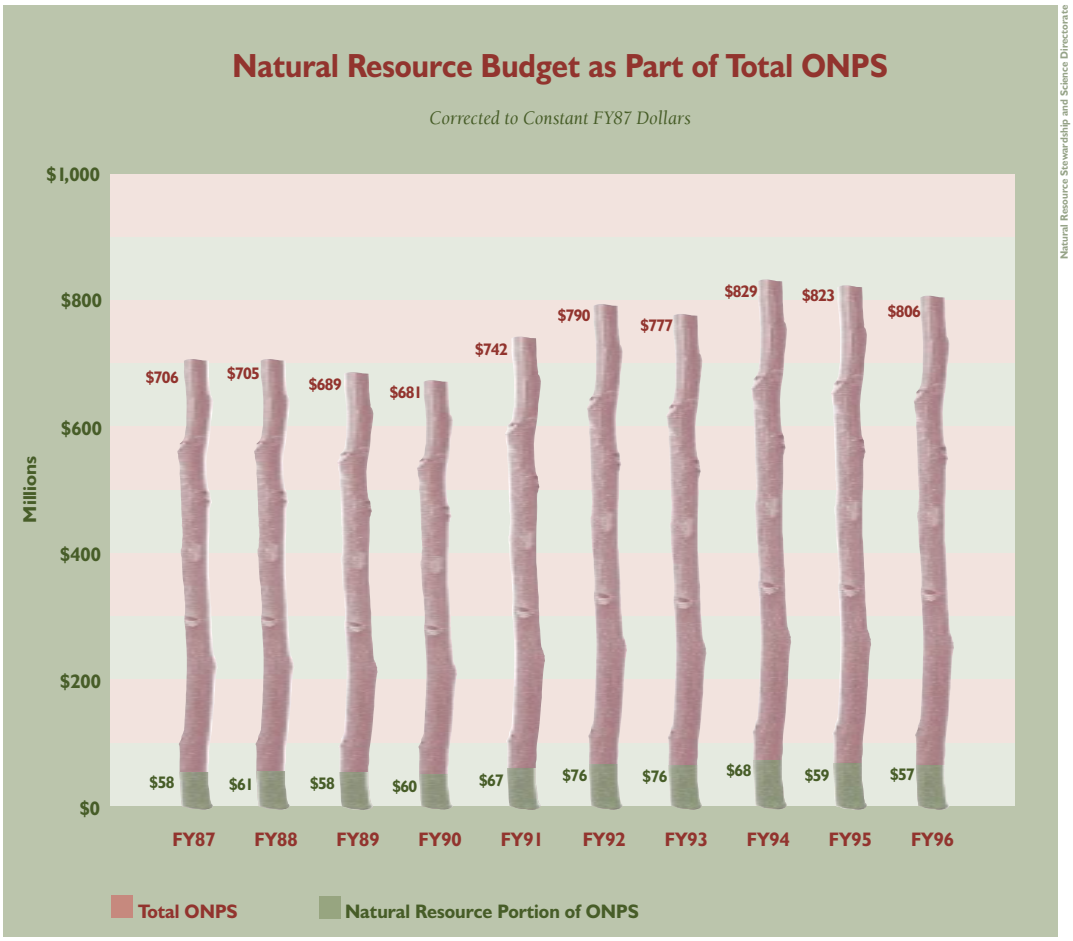
Fiscal year 1996 continued a downward trend in natural resource funding that began in FY95. In terms of actual dollars, constant dollars, and percent of the operation of national park system (ONPS) appropriation, FY95 and FY96 natural resource funding declined approximately 12% while the total ONPS appropriation grew 2% over the FY94 level. Despite the transfer of $20 million to the National Biological Survey (NBS, now USGS Biological Resources Division—BRD) in FY94, natural resource funding went up slightly that year from FY93. Expenditures for natural resource management for FY96—actual expenditures, rather than projected expenditures presented in the budget—were about 3% less than appropriated. Although regional and support office funding is only 10–11% of total funding, expenditures at this level declined 16% in FY95 and FY96, contributing to this overall decline.

The ONPS appropriation is the largest of five principal appropriations for the National Park Service, accounting for 82% of all NPS funds, and contains most natural resource-related funding. Elsewhere, $916,000 is included for the National Natural Landmarks Program and $338,000 for environmental compliance activities, but this discussion focuses on ONPS funds only. In addition to a small administrative costs category, the ONPS appropriation has four major subdivisions; maintenance (32% of total ONPS in FY96), visitor services (23%), park support (20%), and resource stewardship (16%). This last category includes cultural resource research and resource management, natural resource research and resource management, and resource protection (i.e., ranger resource protection patrols).

In FY96, over two-thirds (approximately $52.4 million) of the $76.4 million in ONPS funds allocated to natural resource management and science went to the field (parks, support offices, and regional offices). The remaining $24 million funded the Natural Resource Program Center and the Washington Office Natural Resource Stewardship and Science Directorate. Much of these funds went to parks in direct project dollars (about $8 million in Natural Resource Preservation

Lava Tube, *El Malpais National Monument, New Mexico.*



Sharing Costs

Approximately $400,000 (28%) of the $1.1 million available for park projects in FY96 Challenge Cost Share Program funds were used to support at least 36 natural resource preservation, study, or rehabilitation projects.

Program, water resource, and GIS projects), centralized acquisition of park data (e.g., inventories), and technical assistance.

Two observations can be made about the recent downward trend in natural resource funding. First, following establishment of the NBS in October 1993, funding for natural resource management has declined slightly. Between FY87 and FY93 (for which figures are readily available) natural resource line items increased 53%. Since then, natural resource initiatives have not been as successful. Second, natural resource-related appropriations for the field dropped 18% in FY94 and FY95 while overall park appropriations rose 6.6%.

Natural resource management funding in parks is not dictated by the portion of park funding described for resource management in the budget request, but by the amount that superintendents elect to assign to this function. Additionally, the NPS budget tracking system does not distinguish between some types of resource management activities. For example, under this system, both foot patrol and visitor management in wilderness are classified as "resource management" expenditures, on a par with scientifically established monitoring activities. This is important because future budgets are based on these figures, which are not very precise in measuring park resource management activities. During this period of declining park natural resource expenditures and slightly increasing overall park funding, parks were required by two different initiatives to increase grades and salaries of rangers and take on additional benefit costs in converting many temporary employees to term or permanent staff. These and other types of cost increases reduce the flexibility of superintendents in allocating increases.

As long as natural resource funding initiatives are relatively unsuccessful and superintendents are pressed to fund aspects of park management other than natural resource management, the downward trend is likely to continue. On the other hand, the FY98 budget forwarded to Congress could change that trend, due to significant nationally focused initiatives, all of which provide direct assistance or project funding to parks.

A first for National Park of American Samoa

by Bob Cook

The year 1996 marked a milestone for the National Park of American Samoa and its natural resource management program. At a time when few parks are seeing staff increases, the National Park of American Samoa in the South Pacific experienced a 50% increase, as a wildlife biologist signed on. Though a workforce of three is still extremely small for a park this size (10,520 acres on three islands), placing a wildlife biologist here was a significant decision in keeping with the unique nature of the park.

When Congress authorized the park in 1988, the National Park Service embarked upon a journey into new biomes and new approaches to park management. Created to preserve Old World, mixed-species rainforest and the flying foxes (large fruit bats) that inhabit it, the park also encompasses some of the finest examples of Indo-Pacific coral reef, with species richness greater than found in Atlantic reefs. Also unique is this park's approach to management, rooted in the traditional land tenure system of American Samoa. Here, lands are held communally by villages, with all land use decisions being made by village councils, composed of the matai (head) from each of the villages' extended families. Thus, instead of owning park land, the National Park Service leases it from the eight villages that comprise the park, and works closely with village councils in developing and implementing park programs and regulations.

The decision to employ a wildlife biologist at the park resulted from the convergence of a number of NPS programs, and is a reflection of the importance placed on the natural resources. Key among these programs was the Natural Resource Management Assessment Program (NR-MAP). NR-MAP analysis indicated that the park needed the equivalent of 24 positions to conduct a comprehensive natural resource program. Based on this analysis and follow-up prioritization by the Pacific-West Region, the wildlife biologist position for the park was ranked the number-one priority in the region.

Having a biologist on staff at this early stage is a critical step toward achieving our resource stewardship goals. The park is still very much in the planning and development stages, and a staff biologist better ensures a plan with minimal resource impacts. Since arriving in American Samoa in 1996, the biologist has begun surveys of resource conditions, mapping significant features such as colonies of roosting fruit bats and seabirds, and areas of feral pig damage. Proposed trail routes are being evaluated for potential impacts long before construction funds are obligated.

While one biologist, aided by volunteers, is far from a full-blown program, it is a significant start. It accelerates the development of a more comprehensive natural resource management program as threats and issues, identified in planning documents, are reevaluated in depth. Individual, broadly focused project statements

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Preservation of flying foxes *was a prime impetus in establishing National Park of American Samoa.*

NPS photo by Doug Cullard

National Park of American Samoa *comprises three islands in the South Pacific. Beautiful beaches, rugged topography, and one of the most pristine and diverse coral reefs in American Samoa are features of the Ofu park unit.*

in the park resource management plan are being expanded into several statements, each detailing specific steps needed to evaluate and respond to an issue. Having a biologist to separate large issues into smaller, more discrete components has led to increased success in obtaining project funding. As a result of efforts in 1996, the park obtained funding to conduct a detailed survey of Laufuti, the park's principal perennial stream and a likely destination for visitors to the park's Ta'u Unit. Being able to quantitatively assess a resource condition before receiving visitation is certainly a strong argument for placing a resource specialist in a park at the very beginning.

While few national parks had the benefit of a professional biologist on staff at their outset, it is now fairly well accepted that parks with significant natural resources require resource specialists to accomplish resource stewardship goals. Based on a recent analysis of NPS natural resource personnel, of the approximately 250 parks with significant natural resources, roughly 90 still lack their first professional natural resource manager. Additionally, 107 of these parks have no staff classified in biological or physical science personnel series. While additional staff are difficult to fund, the long-term benefits—more effective stewardship of park natural resources—is certainly worth the cost.

Professionalization

The Resource Careers Initiative

by Kathy Davis

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If the National Park Service is to be successful in protecting and preserving nationally significant natural and cultural resources, it must implement a human resources program to meet the stewardship needs of the agency. For this purpose, the National Park Service launched the Resource Careers Initiative in 1994 as part of the *Vail Agenda.* A national team of resource managers, personnelists, and classifiers assembled and defined issues, selected occupational series, and conducted extensive fact-finding position reviews at 13 parks and a museum center.

Natural Resource Information Division

A resource manager *at Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument, Idaho, uses a laser transit and global positioning system to inventory fossil resource sites.*

In examining 125 positions, NPS personnelists found that the minimum full-performance level for professional resource management positions is clearly GS-11. However, some professional positions are filled with people lacking expertise or education to perform professional work or are hired below the skill and grade level needed for the job. Concurrently, many well-qualified technicians are performing professional work not reflected in their grades or position descriptions (PDs). Also, in some parks, full-time resource managers are classified in the wrong occupational series, typically the GS-025 park ranger series, which the Office of Personnel Management defines as a nonprofessional, administrative series.

This situation raises classification and position management concerns. As the personnelists discovered in their interviews, generalists are often attempting to perform professional-level work. For budgetary or downsizing reasons, professional work is being diluted as staff are assigned other types of work. Additionally, the personnel team observed that resource managers feel they are more successful in competing for resource-related budgets and priorities if the resource management function reports to the superintendent or assistant superintendent.

In August 1996, the team worked on implementing the resource careers recommendations by writing PDs

for 20 occupational series for the GS-11 minimum performance level work. Career entry and ladders were provided with benchmarks at the lower grade levels. Thus, a qualified person can enter at the GS-5, 7, or 9 level and advance noncompetitively to GS-11 based on performance. Establishing this ladder creates the foundation for professional resource careers within the National Park Service and recognizes the expertise needed and the value of the work.

The team distributed the draft PDs and an implementation plan for review in December, and over 250 parks returned worksheets identifying staff who would need to have their grades or positions adjusted to match the level of their work. In late January 1997, the associate directors for natural and cultural resources presented these results and the estimated costs to the NPS National Leadership Council. This group endorsed the findings and will seek funds for fiscal year 1999 to implement the initiative. If the money is received, implementation will occur; if not, it will be optional. Meanwhile the PDs can be used as intended. The resource careers team will continue writing PDs for the GS-12 professional series and benchmarks for the technician series, but will not seek funding for these positions.

Managers and resource staff must keep the initiative at a high profile so it does not fade away.

Resource management fundamentals training debuts

by Dennis Vásquez

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A new era in the professional development of NPS natural resource managers began in May 1996 with the inaugural session of the "Fundamentals for Natural Resources Managers" training program. The six-week long program was held at the Albright Training Center at Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona, with field trips to Lake Mead National Recreation Area and Flagstaff, Arizona. Twenty-three resource managers took part in the program.

The need for such a training program had been identified in a number of recent reports including the *Vail Agenda* (1992) and the *Strategic Plan for Improving the Natural Resource Program of the National Park Service* (1995). Dozens of individuals were involved in the development of the syllabus for the training course.

The fundamentals course is designed to enhance the academic training of new employees in professional natural resource management positions with knowledge specific to the management of natural resource programs in the National Park Service. Graduates of the course will be able to apply laws, policies, agency expertise, public input, and research information into park resource management operations. Two major themes ran through the

Trainees of the first "fundamentals" course *toured Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Nevada, to gain insights on restoring slow-growing native vegetation to abandoned or closed dirt roads.*

Natural Resource Information Division

Professionals On Rise

Between 1993 and 1997, professional natural resource management positions in parks increased by 136. Not all are new positions, as many resulted from reclassification, and some are in interpretation or maintenance divisions, rather than resource management. Still, this represents a 33% increase since 1992.

course: (1) an ecosystem approach to management; and (2) planning and implementing a resource management program to include natural resource, cultural resource, and social science considerations.

In a year when funds for training were scarce throughout the Park Service, the National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA), the National Park Foundation, and the Natural Resource Stewardship and Science Directorate joined to provide the financial support to conduct this foundational piece in the training strategy for natural resource managers. Regional directors of NPCA participated and added a valuable component to the class.

Class participants left the program with more knowledge, more tools, a larger network of contacts, and a deeper sense of commitment to the stewardship mission of the National Park Service. In a letter signed by all graduates of the first "fundamentals" class, participants committed themselves to taking an integrated approach to resource management, cultivating partnerships, endorsing a strong science program, advocating career pathways for resource managers to achieve high-level positions within our agency, and taking an active role in the leadership of the National Park Service.

Reorganization

Are we flourishing yet?

by Bob Krumenaker

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"Natural resource management will flourish if sufficient numbers of well-trained staff are provided at all levels of the restructured NPS." That was the fundamental statement of the 1995 *Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Natural Resource Management in the National Park Service,* convened at the behest of then Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks George Frampton. He had approved the 1994 NPS restructuring plan upon the condition that the Park Service make "natural resource management flourish" in the future.

Restructuring was supposed to accomplish a shift of resources to the lowest levels to help parks meet their responsibilities, and some of this happened. At the end of 1996, there *were* more natural resource management professionals in parks than in 1995. As expected with this reorganization, significantly fewer resource professionals were in support offices, including the Natural Resource Stewardship and Science Directorate, at the end of 1996 than in 1995. However, the numbers do not paint the entire picture.

Many parks are now doing what former central office staff once did and finding they have less time to accomplish their own park needs. Ironically, the greater the expertise in the field, the greater the demand the field resource managers have for technical assistance. Staff that remain in central offices find themselves less able to provide service to the field, due to fewer numbers and the demands of the new and different bureaucracies that have developed in place of regional offices. Coordination and consistency between offices is a struggle and technical expertise in central offices, and in some offices of the USGS Biological Resources Division, has decreased dramatically.

There are also several successes to report. Some of the increase in natural resource positions in the field has come from superintendents who have voluntarily restructured their own workforces. More parks are sharing staff. Some new professional "circuit rider" positions have been established, providing expertise to several parks. Remaining project funds appear increasingly to be going to small parks that had trouble competing under the old system. Both clusters in the Midwest have chosen to assess their own park bases to create new sources of funds for critical projects. Parks in the Northeast have developed a Natural Resources Strategic Plan that calls for no net loss in natural resource positions or funding. The managers support the plan, and it is working. The lack of clear central office structure has also allowed ad hoc personnel assignments on strategic issues, such as aircraft overflights in the Intermountain Region.

The picture as a whole shows some promise, but many in the ranks are disillusioned. Our preoccupation with restructuring in times of limited budgets has precluded the major reinvention that we had hoped for.

The Natural Resource Program Center

by Dan Kimball

The National Park Service established the Natural Resource Program Center in mid-1996 as part of its restructuring effort. The center is a key component of the Natural Resource Stewardship and Science Directorate and was created to provide specialized advice and assistance to parks in the protection and management of natural resources, particularly in physical sciences and natural resource disciplines most lacking at parks. Another major goal was to increase the efficiency of providing services to the parks and in administering the various programs of the center.

The center comprises five divisions: Air Resources, Environmental Quality, Geologic Resources, Natural Resource Information, and Water Resources divisions. The center concept enhances communication and coordination among the divisions, resulting in improvements and increased effectiveness in each program area; it also increases efficiency as administrative staff are shared between divisions. Staff of these divisions are located primarily in Colorado, and the center is managed by a leadership council with chairmanship rotating annually.

Each division works both independently and cooperatively, depending on the nature and scope of a particular natural resource issue, activity, or project. In addition to providing specialized expertise in physical and natural sciences, the center also provides policy, regulatory, and permitting assistance to parks; assists in the development of NPS natural resource guidelines; promotes and facilitates interagency and external partnerships; and, on a national basis, compiles and synthesizes natural resource information. Staff of the program center also work closely with the Natural Systems Management Office of the Natural Resource Stewardship and Science Directorate, which provides leadership on major biological issues and in understanding and managing parks as part of larger landscapes or ecosystems.

One tool that has helped the program center integrate its natural resource management programs with other agencies is the part-time placement of technical staff in the offices of cooperating science agencies. The Water Resources Division, for example, works with both the USGS Water Resources Division and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to increase efficiency, break bureaucratic barriers, and share resources. Respective goals of these collaborations have been to increase water-quality data collected in parks through the National Water-Quality Assessment Program (NAWQA) and examination of the potential risks to waterfowl and shorebirds at parks and refuges from the ingestion of lead fishing sinkers. Likewise, the Geologic Resources Division has established liaisons at each of three USGS regional offices across the country, resulting in many projects in the areas of park mapping, research, and visitor education.

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The Northern Pintail (Anas acuta) *is a common North American duck that relies on healthy freshwater habitats in numerous NPS units.*

Although it has been in existence for only a short time, the Natural Resource Program Center has been effectively involved in several significant natural resource issues, such as the proposed New World Mine near Yellowstone National Park, a large landfill proposed adjacent to Joshua Tree National Park, and minerals management planning at three parks in Texas. Staff have also worked together in developing and implementing a number of multidisciplinary natural resource programs, such as abandoned mine lands restoration, natural resource damage assessment, and inventory and monitoring.

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Using the social sciences

In 1996, the National Park Service established a Social Science Program within the Natural Resource Stewardship and Science Directorate. Just under way, the program adds to our capacity to manage natural resources based on sound scientific information.

Yellow monkey flower *(Mimulus guttatus), Bright Angel Creek, Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona.*

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