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Looking to the future

by Denis Galvin

denis_galvin@nps.gov
Acting Director, National Park Service; Washington, D.C.

The challenges for the future of natural resource management in the national park system are discernible in the stories of the past year. Such problems are not new. In 1953, after war and postwar priorities had cut park funding as visitation climbed, an article in *Harper's Magazine* warned that the national park system was verging on crisis and that "much of the priceless heritage . . . is beginning to go to hell." Parks have long felt this concern. However, the scope of the problems facing natural resource management has compounded over time.

The solutions involve efforts in many disciplines. *Science:* The National Park Service must acquire more knowledge about park resources through inventory, monitoring, and research. Park science must encompass economics, social science, and the biological and physical sciences, and must stress professional credibility, peer review, and publication. Although scientific information is increasingly essential to prudent management, it is rarely sufficient to achieve natural resource protection. *Law, Policy, and Politics:* Park Service personnel must also know the legal responsibilities and opportunities for natural resource protection, the associated policies, and the politics that affect the range of possibilities. With this knowledge, professional natural resource managers can gather the highest priority scientific information and employ it in the most effective forums. *Education and Outreach:* Resource protection ultimately depends on an informed and supportive public. Scientists must analyze and interpret data and publish results. Resource managers must make the scientific knowledge accessible to park managers, interpreters, other government agencies, and the public. Skilled resource managers must integrate the science, law, and policy into communication that stimulates thought and affects attitudes.

For many reasons, not the least of which are funding and personnel constraints, the future requires continued creativity in solving problems. The NPS proposal for cooperative ecosystem studies units (CESUs) holds promise for efficiently increasing scientific support for management. It also expands the scope of the science to whole systems and landscapes, a critical step for effective ecosystem management.

Ecosystem management requires use of a full array of disciplines, information, and partnerships, and its success depends on developing a shared vision among key decision makers and elements of the public. It can be difficult and often frustrating, because it demands new levels of cooperation among interests often unaccustomed to working together. However, it is essential to long-term park protection. By integrating and reconciling potentially conflicting environmental and economic needs, ecosystem management strives to achieve park protection and to provide for long-term sustainable economic productivity throughout an ecosystem.

A tremendous asset of the National Park Service for achieving success in resource protection is the ardor and dedication of natural resource personnel, some of whom are highlighted in this report. The participants in the Fundamentals for Natural Resource Management training course captured the indomitable spirit of this work force in their declaration of commitment, dated June 27, 1996:

"The preservation of resources for the enjoyment of future generations is embedded in our hearts. The values and principles for which the National Park Service was established inspire us to fulfill our commitment to this vision."

The future of natural resource management in the National Park Service is in good hands.

Alaskan brown bear
(Ursus arctos), *Brooks Falls, Katmai National Park and Preserve, Alaska.*