The partnership phenomenon

Partnerships have received considerable attention as a management strategy for public agencies. The political culture of fiscal constraint and "doing more with less" has led to a groundswell of interest in collaborative partnering and resource-sharing arrangements. Working in partnership increases involvement through democratic means and provides a viable approach for expanding the range of services offered, enhancing the opportunities of park visitors, and building a sense of community pride (Vaske et al. 1995; Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000; Mowen and Kerstetter 2006). Partnerships among public agencies and corporations are now an accepted mechanism to generate additional park and recreation resources that otherwise could not be provided with public funds (Mowen and Everett 2000).

For example, with the help of partners Yellowstone National Park recently designed and constructed a world-class visitor education center using a model of sustainable energy practices. In Florida, the National Park Service has established endowments and worked with educators to deliver park-based curriculum programs to reach underserved communities. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC) has been working with more than 100 partners, 40 communities, and 1,000 volunteers to raise awareness and funds to protect the Appalachian Trail (Edelen 2006). The partnership includes the U.S. Geological Survey, USDA–Forest Service, area schools, universities, and countless volunteers. The partners cooperatively monitor environmental factors and implement programs to protect critical habitats on the trail, where more than 35,000 users are active each year.

Partnerships are increasingly important in the management of public agencies, specifically parks and recreation service providers. Citizens' heightened awareness of broader social issues creates demands to find solutions to financial, human, and capital problems through alternative methods such as collaborative agreements. Through collaboration, traditional park and recreation providers are repositioning themselves to provide goods and services that address broader social missions while supporting their agencies.