



ASSOCIATION OF NATIONAL PARK RANGERS

Stewards for parks, visitors and each other

Beyond the “Endangered Ranger”:

A View from Within the National Parks

Earth Day • April 22, 2004

(National Parks Week)

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* For ease in comparison, these are the same headings as used in the National Parks Conservation Association’s “Endangered Rangers” Report, March 2004.



Executive Overview

The Smithsonian Institution has been called the Nation's attic. National parks contain the places where history occurred. As such they then represent the Nation's foundation. This great Nation has chosen to preserve for future generations the best that the country has in terms of its scenic, natural, cultural, recreational and historic legacy. Park rangers have the privilege and responsibility of caring and providing for the enjoyment of this special heritage.

Today the NPS budget is the largest that it has ever been. Despite this fact, this report shows that, per capita, national park employees must provide services to more visitors and protect more acres, with far greater job complexity, than 20, 10 or even 5 years ago.

This report both supports the accuracy of the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) *Endangered Rangers Report* (March 2004), and elaborates on issues that have come up as a result. This report focuses on issues from the perspective of providing basic, routine, mission-focused operations of the National Park Service (NPS). Within the NPS community, this funding is known as Operation of the National Park System (ONPS). Use of programs that the NPCA report termed "short term solutions," including volunteers and partnerships, *while absolutely critical to the long-term vitality of the system, do not deal with the critical core issue*. Each of those programs come with unique expenses that can divert resources from mission-critical work. Nor do the programs get at the heart of the issue: basic national park operations are chronically under funded and under staffed.

Since the routine daily operation of national parks are the subject of this report, side issues of land acquisition, construction, rivers and trails, and other programs that are not park-based, are not addressed. Funds for these other programs are not available to national park managers for routine park operations, and therefore are tangential to the purposes of this report.

Introduction



The term "ranger" is used as it was used in the "Endangered Rangers" Report by NPCA (March 2004), and indeed as used by visitors: to denote field national park service employees. The Association of National Park Rangers (ANPR) promotes the concept of being a "ranger at heart," meaning any employee vested in the mission of the National Park Service, whether uniformed or not, and regardless of job title. "Field" in this report refers to NPS employees based in parks themselves, usually in uniform, and excludes agency employees in offices remote from parks, including regional offices.

National park managers have dealt with the "erosion of base funding" for over a decade. Ten or more years ago managers had multiple options available to deal with eroding budgets. Today, however, all of the easy and most of the harder

"Do not let the service become 'just another Government bureau,' keep it youthful, vigorous, clean and strong."
Horace Albright,
NPS Director, 1929-1933

options have already been employed – leaving little choice but to cut into core mission functions. These cuts result in a reduction or loss of service to the public and stewardship to park resources. As early as 1991, the Vail Agenda report observed: “Budgetary restraints have also played a role in limiting Park Service interpretive programs. Throughout most of the past decade, NPS budgets caused managers to cutback [sic] on seasonal positions, many of which were in interpretation. Additionally, lack of funds has resulted in a backlog of out-of-date materials, exhibits, and other interpretive tools...”

From the NPS’s June 2001 *Workforce Planning and Restructuring Phase I – Workforce Analysis*, “At least 95 percent of all National Park Service employees routinely work with citizens and customers . . . They are the face of the National Park Service to our citizens and visitors.” That percentage is likely still valid today, except many of these employees are now spread more thinly by the need to work with non-visitor customers including contractors, partners and recruiting partners.

Today some important visitor use (interpreted) sites – sites that are crucial to understanding the core story of the Nation’s history – have been closed to public access. Some national parks are closed several days of the week. Even where sites are open, a multitude of service cutbacks have been made, including reduced or eliminated: maintenance, restroom and trash cleaning; roving interpretation (ranger-to-visitor contact); scheduled ranger tours and programs; visitor center and ranger station hours; lifeguard, waterfront safety and river patrol programs; maintenance of historic buildings; and resource and security monitoring. In addition, some special events have been canceled.

“The public has become accustomed to easy access to National Park rangers and services, but budget constraints mean cutbacks this summer across the country.”
The Associated Press
March 18, 2004

Legacy Stewardship

The NPS Organic Act directs the Service to *conserve* the nationally significant resources contained in national parks to an extraordinary level – to a standard that leaves them *unimpaired* for the enjoyment of future generations. The features that make up this system are *the most* significant, rarest, and the most unique icons of America’s landscape, culture and heritage.

Reaching this standard is a monumental task, one complicated by the current budgetary situation. Documenting the extent of damage or impairment is always challenging, but the dilution of ranger time in the field to perform patrols and monitor the condition of national park resources makes it even more difficult to detect problems, much less ascertain their nature or extent. We do know that many resources that are being stolen, vandalized or destroyed are one-of-a-kind and non-renewable. Stolen archeological or battlefield artifacts cannot be replaced. Nor can geologic resources or fossils. Even if later retrieved through law enforcement action, their legacy value has been lost by the simple act of removal from original context without proper documentation. Some rare plant and animal species could be vandalized out of existence.

“The Park Service operations at \$1.6 billion a year are a tiny part of the \$2.5 trillion federal budget. Parks are obviously high on the public’s list of good things the government does.”
Editorial, San Jose Mercury News
March 19, 2004

“In the \$2.4 trillion federal budget, the [NPS budget] is barely a rounding error.”
Editorial, Corpus Christi-Caller
Times, March 20, 2004

All NPS employees contribute to achieving the NPS Mission through teamwork. Like the three-legged milking stool, when one leg is removed the stool collapses; and like a photographer's tripod, it is much more stable than a bipod or monopod. All members of the park workforce provide essential contributions to the team. Protection cannot be effective without science, research, interpretation, and maintenance. Visitor enjoyment cannot be achieved without maintenance, interpretation, safety, and resources that are in good condition.

"When you lose positions [in parks] someone has to pick up the slack. Guess who it is? The ranger."
A park ranger,
Large Western Park

In 2000, the first comprehensive visitor satisfaction survey for the National Park System showed that 95% of park visitors were satisfied with facilities, services and recreational opportunities. There is a culture, however, in the National Park Service of "hiding the hurt." The last options chosen are always those that impact park visitors. The perception of visitors from their short visit is not the same as the informed view over time of NPS employees and other professionals engaged daily in resource stewardship.

The typical park visitor does not see the effects of patrol and resource program cuts. Rocks, trees, squirrels and waterfalls cannot call "911" when they are being harmed, so the degree of true damage often goes unnoticed and undocumented.

"We are not here to simply protect what we have been given so far; we are here to try to be the future guardians of those areas as well as to sweep our protective arms around the vast lands which may well need us as man and his industrial world expand and encroach on the last bastions of wilderness."
Horace Albright, NPS Director
1929-1933

This report presents the story as seen by the stewardship professionals.

Death by a Thousand Cuts

NPCA's report did an outstanding job of documenting many factors that have resulted in reduced buying-power in park budgets. This report elaborates on those reductions and discusses increased workloads that have exacerbated the situation.

Travel Costs: A Red Herring

Much of the focus since the NPCA report has been on making travel cuts as a means of balancing the ONPS budget. A certain amount of employee travel is essential to the core mission of the Service. Indeed, in some emphasis programs, such as partnerships, travel has increased, in order to meet with sponsors in distant locations. A large portion of the travel budget funds the cost of central office employees providing essential assistance to parks. Most foreign travel is covered from sources other than the NPS budget – the World Bank and US-AID are the biggest contributors. Cooperating associations and friends groups pay a small but significant portion of domestic travel. Even if present domestic travel were cut in half, the savings of \$25 million would not nearly cover the Service's projected deficit in operating funds as cited in the NPCA report (a deficit somewhere in excess of \$600 million).

"But when you look at the park service's budget – this year at \$2.56 billion – those trips abroad and the 10 percent travel cut are chump change."
Nikki Kallio, Writer
Portland (ME) Press Herald
April 7, 2004

Origins of the Current Crisis

“Erosion of Base”

In 1990 ANPR ran a series of articles in *RANGER* magazine (Journal of the Association of National Park Rangers) about the lack of rangers in the field. The articles were run partly as a result of the “Endangered Ranger” hearings conducted by a joint House/Senate subcommittee that year.

In 1989, 1993, 1994 and most recently the Spring 2004 issue of *RANGER* magazine revisited the worsening budget issues.

The main culprit remains escalating personnel costs. Even though the total Operation of the National Park System (ONPS) budget has increased 50% in the last decade, the median average General Schedule pay raises have increased 40%. The remaining 10% increase difference was insufficient to cover the addition of 20 new units to the National Park System and, more significantly, increased costs attributable to the change in retirement programs from the Civil Service Retirement System to the Federal Employees Retirement System. Implementation of Enhanced Annuity Retirement for law enforcement and fire fighter positions over the same period further compounded the problem.

In FY04, in addition to absorbing 2.6% of the required pay increases, the Service had to absorb an increase of 20% in health benefit costs. **Plus** the NPS absorbed a 1.234% across-the-board rescission imposed by Congress.

“The rangers who protect this nation’s public lands are themselves endangered by inadequate support and political interference at a time when these agencies face enormous challenges . . . We must make sure that these professionals receive strong support if they are to protect our nation’s natural and cultural resources properly . . . The people charged with protection and management of this nation’s heritage . . .are stretched to their limits.”

Rep. Bruce Vento

House Hearings on the future of rangers

April 5, 1990

“Professionalization Programs”

The National Park Service’s own initiatives of behalf of its employees – supported by Congress and the Department of Interior – contributed to the budget problem. Starting in the early 1990’s the NPS sought to bring pay standards in line with other agencies and the private sector. Some of these efforts, such as *Ranger Careers*, were partly funded by Congress; others including *Resource Careers*, administrative and maintenance up-grades, were not. These changes were necessary to assure that the NPS hired, retained and assigned work to employees fairly and consistently across the national parks, and that park managers properly compensated employees for the required work and level of expertise. So, while the NPS did right by its employees and the NPS mission, these steps contributed to the budget woes.

“Addition of New Parks”

Since 1974, 97 new parks have been added to the System. Few, if any, of these received full operational funding. Most, if not all, received new ONPS funding to support start-up operations only. After that, they competed with existing parks for operational funding. Over the last 30 years the net effect has been to spread limited operational funds and staff over an ever-increasing number of national parks.

“ . . . since 1990, Congress has added 36 new units to the [National] Park Service without a commensurate budget increase. That includes the National World War II Memorial . . .in Washington DC. It will cost \$2 million a year to operate.”

Editorial, Philadelphia Inquirer

March 31, 2004

Additions to the National Park System are appropriate and indeed necessary; they need to come into the system along with full operational funding.

“Unfunded New or Emergency Programs”

Congress has often generated new mandates for the NPS without accompanying funds to implement the programs. Despite good intent or the need to adapt to new technology, these mandates either remain unmet or stretch already thin financial resources even thinner. Two recent examples serve as surrogates for 30 years worth of new mandates:

Law requires that federal agencies convert their radio systems to narrow-banding by 2005. Another new law provides that Automatic External Defibrillators (AED’s) be placed in buildings and areas with certain occupancies. Neither law came with funding. In the case of the radio, the NPS was not allowed to request new funds even after the Service did a detailed analysis on the needs and costs. Consequently, neither mandate has been fulfilled in most national parks. A few large national parks have been able to rob other fund sources (see “Fee Demo” below) where the new programs are critical to public safety.

In the past few years, the NPS has not been permitted to request emergency funds to cover national wildland fire responses or hurricane damage. Necessary funds, which could not have been planned, had to be re-programmed from other sources including vital park operations.

Some Unkind Cuts

<i>Gettysburg NMP & Eisenhower NHS Base Operating Budget Impacts</i>	
<i>Fiscal Year 2003</i>	
Unfunded Pay Increase	\$289,922
Departmental Mandated Reduction	7,000
Mandated 0.65% Across the Board Cut	40,918
Total Reduction in purchasing power from FY02:	\$337,840
<i>Fiscal Year 2004</i>	
Appropriations Reduction	\$ 49,000
New Assessments against Park Budget	125,000
Unfunded Pay Increase	184,600
Total Reduction in purchasing power from FY03:	\$309,600
Total reduction in purchasing power for <i>only</i> the last two years has been \$647,440, or a reduction of 10.4%. This translated into a reduction in personnel of 13%.	

National Park Service managers have come under some criticism for a perceived inability to manage parks within their budget. The typical example above from Gettysburg illustrates that managers do not entirely control their own destiny. The example is by no means exceptional. Similar impacts have affected every park’s budget.

Identifying the Needs

Increased Complexity

Like most other professions, the park ranger's work has changed significantly in the past 30 years. New laws (Archeological Resource Protection Act and the Clean Air Act, for examples), and new technologies (computers, AED's and Global Positioning Systems, for examples), have created new responsibilities, which have inevitably led to increased specialization and workload. Agency reorganization, while ostensibly done to reduce layering and unnecessary bureaucracy, has done neither. While these changes are difficult to document, one example should suffice. As a result of the 1995 NPS restructuring, 52 volumes of park management guidelines were abolished in favor of a simpler, cleaner system. Nine years later, under a new name and different structure, the system has 119 volumes (including sub-volumes). **More than double the original number.** A commensurate increase in funding and positions has not occurred to support these changes.

Increased Accountability

Across the NPS, there is great emphasis on accountability and documentation. Within the last 10 years the largest workload increase has been procedural and administrative requirements. The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, and the National Park Omnibus Management Act of 1998 both established new and time-consuming reporting and record keeping requirements, affecting all park operations. Within the last several years, the Facility Management Software System (FMSS) and Activity Based Costing (ABC) and Management, while potentially providing far greater accountability, also require far more staff time. In smaller parks it is necessary to commit the equivalent of one position to these new systems; in larger parks it may take up to three or four positions. Meeting these requirements takes funding away from programs that support employees at all grade levels, including seasonal employees.

Better Business Management

The National Park Service owes a great debt to the NPCA for its efforts in the Business Plan Initiative. This six-year partnership has not only helped managers operate more efficiently, but has identified areas of greatest business management needs in the Service. It has quantified those needs and identified their source. For the first time, the NPS has the proper tools to analyze and formulate its budget information in a business-like way. This is in keeping with government-wide trends and Congressional requests for more coherent budget information. Business Plans are based on basic park needs, rather than on wishful thinking as some have charged. Among the national parks that have completed Business Plans, the *average* gap between operational needs and available funding is roughly 1/3rd. Some parks show much higher shortfalls, including Apostle Islands with a 58% deficit.

Staffing Shortages

National Parks are places of inspiration that lead many to careers in public or conservation service. NPS school programs have inspired many children, from all walks of life, to get involved in conservation and/or public service. Rangers are often the catalyst for that inspiration. Experience as a volunteer at Canyonlands National Park in 1976 prompted one young lady to pursue a career in conservation. She went on to

become a Forest Supervisor for the US Forest Service. A volunteer at Chaco Culture NHP in 1980 was so inspired by his experience that he took a law degree specializing in Native American law. Now he is one of the Department of Interior's leading Solicitors in that field.

Despite resounding testimonials to the positive effect that rangers have on visitors and others, today many visit their national parks without ever seeing a park ranger. In the late 1990s two off-duty park rangers toured eight national parks in southern Arizona. They were seeking contacts with rangers – going to Visitor Centers, staying in campgrounds, going on guided hikes – however, in only two of the parks did they ever even see a ranger.

In one area of the country 48 parks recently reported:

- Reducing public access hours, days of the week and/or seasons of the year (23 in 2004; an additional 15 in 2005).
- Closing areas of the park and/or public facilities (8 in 2004; an additional 15 in 2005)
- Elimination of visitor programs or services (18 in 2004; an additional 17 in 2005)
- Deferring maintenance on facilities, including historic structures (21 in 2004; an additional 12 in 2005)

And most distressing of all to this employee-based Association:

- Elimination of all seasonal positions (3 in 2004; an additional 10 in 2005)
- Need to request Reduction-in-Force (RIF) authority for permanent positions (1 park in 2004; 2 more in 2005; 6 more in 2006, and 2 more in 2007)
- Seven parks that will have to close or merge between 2006 and 2009.

Where are the Rangers?

Visitation in 2003 totaled 413,766,085 (*including* non-recreational visits, which impact the field workload). That year Federal Budget *authorized* **16,236 FTE¹** *for national parks units*. (Other NPS employees are stationed in central offices and training centers.) Many park employees such as superintendents, division chiefs, auto mechanics, GIS specialists, budget technicians, and others, while essential to effective park operations, do not have routine visitor contact or resource responsibilities. Time spent processing reports, on homeland security details, weather closures, national fire callouts, sick leave and vacations, doing safety audits, mandatory computer security training, or on the myriad of increasing documentation requirements, critically reduce time available for visitor service and resource stewardship.

¹ FTE = *Full-Time Equivalent*. In other words, if every employee worked full time, there would be this number of employees. Since many Park Service employees work part-time or seasonally, the actual number of employee is greater than the Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) number. *Authorized vs. actual numbers*. In any given year factors preclude the Park Service from completely filling all FTE: transfers, resignations, and retirements are the uncontrolled influences; lack of adequate budget to cover personnel costs is an additional factor. Determining the actual number of employees for a full year is problematic, whereas tracking FTE can be done thru payrolls.

Field rangers are stretched thin

	Total Visits	% Change	Acres	% Change	# Parks	ONPS Budget
1974	217,437,600		31,106,308		290	\$193.5 m
1984	332,671,283	53%	79,425,452	154%	337	\$601.1 m
1994	380,156,046	14%	83,302,981	5%	368	\$1,061.8 m
2003	413,766,085	9%	84,398,239	2%	387	\$2,560.0 m
Cumulative Change		90%		171%	33%	

So, on a daily basis, approximately 13,000 National Park Service employees are *potentially available to interact with visitors and/or the resources in their park*. This works out to approximately 6,500 acres (over 10 square miles), and almost 32,000 visitors *per employee*. A similar analysis for field employees in 1971 showed approximately 2,900 acres (4½ square miles) and 4,800 visitors per employee. **In slightly more than 30 years the number of acres per field employee has more than doubled and the number of visitors has gone up more than six times.** The quality of visitor contact and the coverage of park area have suffered greatly.

Some are quick to point out that the Service now has more volunteers, natural history associations, concessionaires, and a variety of other partners that help. *True and thank goodness*, or the National Park Service would not come close to meeting its core mission. However, the mission of each of these partners is different from that of paid NPS staff and does not take the place of that *professional* capacity. Additionally these support groups legally are prohibited from working in place of paid NPS staff. This practice is occurring, however, in order to provide a measure of service and stewardship.

Long Hot Summer(s): Tight Budgets Get Tighter

The current budget situation has been building to a crisis level over a number of years and there is no relief in sight. As pointed out in the *Endangered Rangers* report, little of the Administration's 4.5 % proposed increase for next year will go into park operations. A proposed budget cap on all discretionary domestic spending would make matters worse. The current Long Hot Summer of "Service Level Adjustments" will only signal the beginning of a downward spiral of visitor services and resource protection.

Homeland Security Details

When the nation is on Orange Alert, the NPS spends about \$65,000 per day on security detail assignments (March 2004 figure). The Service has not been allowed to request additional funding to cover this cost, so the funds have to be robbed from other NPS sources. That is only part of the story. Detailing rangers out of their parks impacts virtually every other aspect of park operations. The job of every ranger left behind gets more arduous and complex with longer hours as they try to pick up the slack, leading to stress and lack of rest. One park superintendent notes ironically that when the nation reaches Code Orange he is directed to increase security in his park while at the same time he is required to detail up to 25% of his law enforcement commissioned rangers to provide security at other parks. He can't do both. Ultimately it is the park visitors and resources that suffer.

Policy of “No Net Loss”

Parks have been losing law enforcement commissioned ranger positions for some time, jeopardizing officer safety, visitor safety, and the protection of park resources. Between 1980 and 2001 filled law enforcement ranger positions fell 16%, while visitation rose 41%. A 1995 report at Lake Mead NRA cited the need for 34 additional law enforcement commissioned rangers. Since then, none have been added and 11 more have been lost due to budget constraints. To stem this erosion and assure adequate agency contributions to post 9-11 homeland security alerts, the NPS is operating under a “No Net Loss” policy for law enforcement ranger positions. This is a laudable and appropriate objective. Many park managers, however, face the choice of closing down all or some of their park, or filling a vacant law enforcement ranger position. Superintendents have also been told that only the Washington Office can approve significant closures. So visitor use facilities are being closed, often under the national radar screen, *and* we continue to lose law enforcement ranger positions. ***Bottom line: the Antideficiency Act, which prohibits overspending, trumps policy every time.***

NPS Budget Formulation

The National Park Service’s budget formulation process ***does not:***

- Include increased costs from the growing percentage of employees in the new “FERS” retirement system (benefits range from 33-50%; the older system ranged from 13-35%)
- Keep pace with rising costs of salary increases required by law.
- Capture the full costs of within-grade step increases.
- Keep pace with general inflationary costs of supplies and equipment.
- Keep pace with increases in energy and utilities.

As a result of the above items *alone*, the “purchasing power” of park budgets has declined 1-3% per year. Couple the above with additional across-the-board assessments:

- In 2003 and 2004 the Interior appropriations bill contained a 0.656% cut.
- In 2004 the Service absorbed a 0.59% cut in the Omnibus appropriations bill.
- The Washington and Regional Offices had to assess park base operation funds (ONPS) to meet critical needs including Information Technology upgrades, emergency law enforcement and storm damage repairs.

“But what’s needed is a comprehensive plan that deals with budget realities while preserving parks as places of unspoiled beauty and educational experiences.”
Editorial, USA Today
March 25, 2004

Real Needs

The NPS budget has two major components, project (one-time) funding and reoccurring (operational) funding. **Project funding** is appropriate for some elements and must continue. It is however, inefficient for funding personnel and basic park operations including routine maintenance, custodial services, interpretive and education programs and activities, patrols, daily monitoring,

“The parks are a national treasure and the Park Service should not restrict our citizen’s ability to enjoy them”
Rep.s Norm Dicks and Charles Taylor
March 19, 2004
Letter to Director Mainella

routine minor emergencies, wilderness and backcountry operations, basic ongoing natural and cultural resource activities, administrative support, general management, program support, and routine supplies and equipment.

Funding for these routine base operations should come from the second major funding component, **operational funding**, or **ONPS**. While the total NPS budget is \$2.56 billion, the ONPS *portion* of the budget is just \$1.6 billion. In the last few years, lack of operational funds has resulted in the practice of “**management by lapse.**” The primary methods available to parks to reduce personnel costs are; 1) avoid hiring temporary employees and/or 2) not filling vacant permanent positions. Superintendents have little choice but to lapse vacant field positions to cover new and increased needs for positions in: Information Technology, concessions management, project management, and the management of volunteers, partnerships and philanthropy, and accountability. As park managers apply position management options, some of the more noticeable results have included:

Case Study: Permanently lapsed positions at Gettysburg and Eisenhower, FY03:

Eisenhower Site Manager
Preservation Worker
Exhibit Specialist
Historic Architect
Custodial Worker (contracted)
Painter (contracted)

- Eliminated routine maintenance for some categories of facilities;
- Custodial services cut by half or more;
- Interpretive programs reduced or eliminated;
- Patrol of visitor use areas and for resource protection reduced;
- Wilderness and backcountry operations reduced and eliminated; and
- Some categories of resource programs are being scaled back or eliminated.

Formulating a Sustainable Funding Program

ANPR does not recommend a specific dollar amount that the NPS should receive to make ONPS funding whole because such figures become dated almost immediately. However, the following are major considerations in formulating a fully funded program for the National Park Service:

- Fund the Service’s authorized FTE ceiling plus 20% for support costs. Because budgets are so constrained, actually filled FTE has declined 5% to 7% in recent years; smaller areas are hardest hit.
- Fund the unfunded and under funded programs added since 1990; include:
 - Law Enforcement Background checks. Roughly \$4,000 per commissioned ranger.
 - Mandated Information Technology upgrades. Washington Office’s estimate (as of 3/04) is that 1,800 to 2,400 computers must be replaced by December 2004 to meet the Department of Interior’s mandate. Average cost will be about \$1,000 each including new hardware and software.
 - Radio narrow band conversion.
 - Homeland Security details. \$1 million per day when the nation is on Orange alert (March 2004 figure)
 - New areas. Most have only been funded for start-up operations. Full operational costs are seldom forthcoming and therefore have been taken from other, established parks’ budgets.
 - Cost of permanent change of station moves according to GSA regulations.

- Examine independent evaluations of park needs, such as NPCA’s *Business Plans* and *State of the Parks* reports, National Recreation and Parks Association’s standards for recreation staffing, the NPS and International Association of Chiefs of Police reports on Law Enforcement needs (includes the United States Park Police).
- Examine needs documented in internal *management assessment profiles* for staffing necessary to accomplish agency mission, including profiles called: VMAP, NR-MAP and CR-MAP.
- Fund the NPS training and development program commensurate with the standard for successful organizations – about 5% of the personnel budget:
 - o NPS goal since 1994-95 has been about 3%, or about \$21 million in 2000.
 - o In reality the 2000 training budget was \$8.7 million, or about 1.2% of the personnel budget. The trend prior to 2000 was about 1%.
 - o This is below both the government and industry averages.
- Employee and visitor safety program commensurate with averages for successful organizations. Cost savings will be realized in reduced workman’s compensation and Tort claims.
- Fund a vehicle and heavy equipment replacement program on an industry standard amortization schedule.

(Note: Some parks with ties to military bases are running fleets of military surplus vehicles in order to save on vehicle replacement costs. Since these vehicles have already reached life-cycle replacement, they can be unreliable. In addition, they are difficult and expensive to maintain and present a poor image. Parks without such ties are using equipment past their recommended service life. One national park in Pennsylvania was finally able to survey a truck that had a hole in the floor covered by a stop sign! Outstanding NPS mechanics are patching vehicles, boats, and other equipment, but at increasing cost and decreasing effectiveness.)

Short Term Solutions: The Band-Aid® Approach

Seasonal Rangers: a Great Return on Investment

Parks still experience spikes in visitation during the warmer months. Field work including interpretation, visitor and resource protection, natural and cultural resource management, and maintenance increases in warmer months. Volunteers, contractors and partners can handle some of this increase. Other work requires a level of commitment, training and knowledge of NPS policies and processes available only from NPS employees. Traditionally, the NPS has hired seasonal rangers – people employed for 90-180 days to help with this summer workload.

Tightening budgets have caused erosion of seasonal staffing because it is the easiest and first place to cut. In 2004, for the first time since World War II, many parks cannot afford to employ any Seasonals. Seasonal employment, however, presents a win-win situation for the government and those employed:

- Seasonal employment is effective in creating a diverse workforce **and**

“Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site in Elverson, Pa, for example, used to hire 25 seasonal workers to dress in costume to share the story of ironmaking and life in the 1800s. This year the park cannot hire any.”

Editorial, Philadelphia Inquirer
March 31, 2004

- These same seasonals are often inspired to become life-long advocates for the parks and proudly talk about the summer(s) they spent working as a park ranger (at least two NPS Directors started their careers as seasonals!)
- Seasonal positions inspire college students – a good recruitment tool for all land-management agencies.
- Seasonal positions employ teachers during the summer – restoring some of their commitment and energy and providing them with enhanced tools when they go back into the classroom. And they bring a high level of knowledge and skill to the parks for comparatively little pay.

Apostle Islands: A Case Study
 In 2003 this park had 14 seasonal interpretation rangers; in 2004 only 9 and the park is not filling vacant permanent positions. In 2003 this park had about \$300,000 above fixed costs for visitor services and resource protection; in 2004 only \$60,000, an 80% reduction in just one year.

Volunteers: Myths and Realities

Park rangers view volunteers as dedicated partners in providing service and stewardship. Many volunteers bring expertise that the NPS could not afford to pay for, and all bring enthusiasm that contributes immeasurably to park work. Volunteers perform a multitude of tasks, including staffing visitor centers, providing interpretive programs, collecting fees, maintaining trails, and performing research. Despite the prohibition in law that volunteers not replace permanent employees, most parks could not achieve their mission without doing that very thing. Most parks still will not use volunteers to perform hazardous duties or for emergency response, though some do.

Although volunteer services are regarded as free, there are many hidden costs and there is also a point of diminishing returns in using volunteers. Like paid employees, volunteers require training and supervision. Higher costs are associated with volunteer training due to higher turnover rates. Paid staff who must be trained in managing a volunteer program must provide these functions. In many remote parks, volunteers need government-provided housing. In those cases, regular housing rates must be paid out of the park budget. In addition, volunteers must be provided with the training, tools and equipment to do the job: vehicles, travel, and incidental supplies.

Because these are volunteers, reliability can be an issue when they are used to cover scheduled services. It is within the purview of a volunteer to decide to not show up on a schedule due to other life events. To expect otherwise is an abuse of their commitment. Nevertheless, volunteers are routinely relied upon to open or close visitor centers, ranger stations, historic buildings and other facilities; to show up and conduct scheduled campfire programs, guided walks and educational programs. At an increasing rate, they often perform these services without the presence or oversight of a professional NPS employee.

Outsourcing: Contracting for Services

This program has been part of doing business for several decades and the NPS has done an admirable job contracting with private enterprises to run hotels, restaurants, gas stations, gift shops, research, public health service, security systems, utilities, parking, custodial and other services. In some specific cases contracting has been appropriate and cost-effective for education programs, certain types of interpretive tours, and some maintenance functions. If it seems appropriate, it has been tried somewhere in the National Park System and lessons learned are being applied throughout the Service, both good and bad.

Arbitrary across-the-board outsourcing goals based solely on reducing the number of NPS employees is not appropriate. Will the American public get their money's worth and the government become more efficient and effective if the NPS sign maker at Mount Rainier is replaced by a contractor? In addition to fabricating signs, he walks every trail in the park to inventory the signs (performing trail patrols in the process), and provides information and interpretation to visitors along the way. In many parks a typical maintenance worker will start the day by mowing a lawn and cleaning the campground. They may then go on to move road barricades, paint a sign, fix a leaky faucet and a light switch in the visitor center (while answering visitor questions), and end the day by helping a stranded visitor. If there is an after-hours emergency, they will work on overtime until the emergency is over. And they will perform this variety of tasks five days/week all year. Contractors are not set up to perform this multiplicity of tasks.

Fee Demonstration: What it can and Cannot Do

The Recreation Fee Demonstration Program has allowed the NPS to make great strides in reducing the maintenance backlog and accomplishing other projects for which other funds would not have been available. However, sometimes fee money is diverted to accomplish unfunded mandates of the NPS, such as conversion of two-way radio systems to a new technology known as "narrow banding." At Biscayne, Everglades and Great Smoky Mountains fee demo funds have been taken from the park for two years to fund narrow banding. In no case are these funds available for basic park operational needs, such as paying permanent employees.

Revenue Enhancement Through Cost Recovery

Congress has made a number of authorities available to parks to recover costs and bring in new funds. Two notable examples are the interpretive fee authority and the real property leasing authority. The interpretive fee authority was intended to allow parks to recover costs for special interpretive programs. However, parks are forced to rely on this authority to provide basic services such as school programs and visitor center films.

The real property leasing authority is comparatively new. Guidelines are just now being published. Because this authority allows parks to lease property at fair market value, it has the potential to both raise revenue and protect resources. However, the underlying cost is that park staff have to have the time and training to advertise and oversee leases.

The Cost of Partnerships

Park managers have been encouraged to establish partnerships to supplement park needs. There are many outstanding success stories. Partnerships have appropriately saved the taxpayer millions of dollars in donated funds and expertise for much needed projects. However, since donated funds cannot pay for permanent salaries, most project funding is for bricks and mortar needs, rather than operational needs. The NPCA Report correctly points out that the goals of the donors and park management do not always coincide, resulting in projects that may be larger than needed. Also, such projects often result in increased operational and maintenance needs, something Congress has appropriately questioned. Funding oversight is an ongoing issue, requiring capabilities and confidence on the part of NPS employees to meaningfully provide such oversight.

Another drawback to the present program is that NPS employees, often poorly trained or untrained, are in competition for grants and other philanthropy with

professionally trained and professionally funded private sector experts. Some parks spend years of effort without raising outside money. Park expenditures for personnel time, phone calls and travel may come close to equaling revenues, due to high competition and lack of training. Without proper training, rangers are getting less and less effective in chasing after grant dollars as this source of funding gets tighter. What works for Yellowstone and Great Smoky Mountains and even a small revolutionary war site, may not work in the remote reaches of Alaska, the far Pacific Islands, or for lesser-known parks in other parts of the country.

Budget constraints are overriding these drawbacks. One park in the southeastern area of the country is making it the “primary job [of every permanent employee] to manage volunteers and work with partners, not to do the work themselves. But it takes a lot of time and energy to develop these kinds of partnerships and with shrinking budgets we no longer have the people to spend the time.” (From a Park Superintendent).

Parks that are successful at getting grants have become dependent on that revenue stream. What happens if or when philanthropy wears thin? Donors like to fund special items, not basic needs. What happens to our national treasures if the economy changes and that revenue stream dries up?

Laws and policies that have enhanced the NPS’s ability to develop and maintain partnerships are critical and should continue to be examined for ways to further enhance their productivity.

Construction and Cyclic Maintenance

Visitors may see construction and large-scale maintenance projects going forward this summer, even while park operations are scaled back. What they may not know is that such projects are accomplished with funds dedicated by Congress and donors specifically for such purposes. Parks are very fortunate to have such funds, but they are not allowed to divert such funds to park operations. The conundrum can be difficult to explain.

Recommendations:

a) Adopt a structured approach to “right-sizing,” “downsizing,” “realistic-sizing,” “recovery planning,” “service level adjustments,” or whatever other euphemistic term might be applied to present trends. Such a structured approach to determining what the NPS should continue doing and what to stop doing must include: 1) complete review of the law and legal requirements contained therein, 2) assessment of all policies having a bearing on park management, 3) systematic assessment and consistent application of the stop-gap measures employed regionally or park-by-park.

“I have been told that there is a culture of fear and intimidation in your offices, and that managers are not allowed to speak freely.”

Congressman Jim Moran
Northern Virginia
(To Director Mainella)

b) Develop and implement an annual ***Park Vitality*** quick assessment tool. Not unlike going to a Doctor for an annual physical, the quick checks on core mission park operations would provide an easily understood overview of the Service’s stewardship capacity.

c) Completely and professionally document and request full funding for mandated programs. At the policy and budget formulation level, establish an 80:20 funding ratio, personnel costs to support costs. Retroactively fully fund mandated programs added since 1990.

d) Identify the parks that are operating at and above 100% of their budget in permanent salaries and fixed costs, and provide immediate funding relief.

e) Establish a baseline (minimum) number of positions for basic operations in administration, protection, interpretation, maintenance, natural and cultural resource management. Provide every unit with adequate personnel cost funding plus 20% additional for support costs to cover training, supplies, materials, and travel.

f) Document the shortfalls in employee and management development and provide financial resources to develop employees at all levels to meet that need.

Closing:

*Due to factors enumerated in this report, and adjusted for inflation, the NPS has fewer funds per acre and per visitor than it did 10 or 20 years ago. There is talk about the NPS having to “shift its priorities.” However, there have not been any priority or policy statements about what that shift ought to be, what we should NOT be doing, or what should be scaled back. Congress and the courts have consistently upheld the importance of conserving national parks for future generations. Unless that mandate is reduced – something that ANPR does **NOT** advocate – more funding is needed for the National Park System. Instead, direction continues to add priorities while the spending power of appropriated funds dwindles, requiring that professional positions be cut.*

Surely the great United States of America is not so poor we cannot afford to have these places, nor so rich we can do without them.

Newton Drury, NPS Director
1940-1951

The **Association of National Park Rangers (ANPR)** is an organization created to communicate for, about, and with park rangers; to promote and enhance the park ranger profession and its spirit; and to support the management and perpetuation of the National Park Service and System. In meeting these purposes, ANPR provides education and other training to develop and improve the knowledge and skills of park rangers and those interested in the profession; provides a forum for discussion of common concerns of park rangers; and provides information to the public. Our membership is comprised of individuals who are entrusted with and committed to the care, study, explanation, and protection of those natural, cultural, and recreational resources included in the National Park System, as well as of individuals who support these efforts.

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