

# Natural Resource Year in Review—2006

A portrait of the year in natural resource stewardship and science in the National Park System

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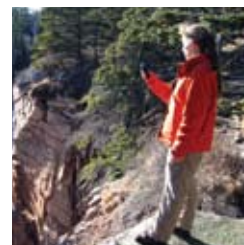
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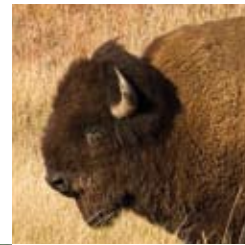
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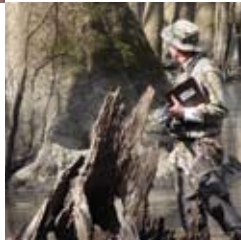
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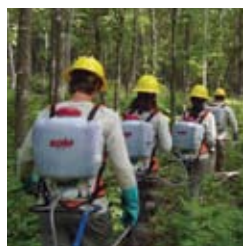
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# The year 2006 in review

## Twelve-year journey concludes with optimism and concern for the future of national parks

**IN EACH EDITION OF *Natural Resource Year in Review*** we have attempted to characterize the calendar year from the perspective of natural resource events in national park units. Our intent has been to illustrate the wide range of topics, issues, and pressures encountered each year while the National Park Service (NPS) strives to maintain national parks unimpaired for present and future generations. When I arrived in Washington from the Everglades more than 12 years ago, I felt it was important to keep an annual log of resource stewardship activities because of the cumulative nature of our progress—and our failures—in protecting park natural resources. While we can be proud of our successes, it is the sum of small failures that will compromise our National Park System.

On my watch I believe that our victories in protecting resources outnumbered our defeats. From the awe-inspiring flights of captive-bred and wild-born condors to reclaimed abandoned mine lands, we have documented many restoration projects and good management decisions in these 11 editions. Altogether the hundreds of articles indicate that prudent, science-based management can provide for the long-term integrity of national park resources. However, the number of demands on national parks and the kinds of decisions that must be made daily—often without much but the best judgment of park managers (which *can vary*)—do not afford certainty that this system can remain an untarnished and true reflection of America's natural heritage.

This is my last regular log entry, as I am retiring from federal service in 2007. Each year I have tried to summarize the things I saw happening across the National Park System and the major themes that surfaced during the year. This edition echoes predominant themes in our work to protect, understand, and celebrate the national parks. I want to use this space to recount some of the major accomplishments in natural resource management during this 12-year journey and bring attention to agenda items left undone.

I believe the Service must find a way to retain and benefit from the accumulated knowledge of long-term,

in-park researchers, such as those whom we are losing with the retirement of the former NPS researchers who were transferred to the U.S. Geological Survey in 1993. We need to capture and access institutional memory more efficiently. We should again share that institutional knowledge with the world protected area community as we once did in the 1960s through the 1990s by reinstating the International Short Course on Park Management. Finally, the National Park Service must become the intellectual hub for engagement in nature and for practical environmentalism in the local communities associated with the 391 units of the National Park System.

We have come a long way. In 1998 we finally got a clear acknowledgment—a mandate—from the Congress in passage of the National Parks Omnibus Management Act that research and monitoring are legitimate activities and requirements for the proper management of national parks. Using that mandate and the implications of Richard Sellars's 1997 *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, we proposed a five-year program called the Natural Resource Challenge to bolster science-based park management. With capitalization on field expertise, expansion of successful prototype programs, and some new ideas, the Challenge found enthusiastic support in the Congress and among national park managers. More than 270 park units with natural resources now have basic inventories (11 databases, including vascular plants and vertebrate animals, on a GIS platform) of the resources they hold. More than 500 new science-based positions have been added to the National Park Service in support of parks, and resource managers now have an enhanced career ladder. Seventeen Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units are now in operation, bringing the resources of more than 200 academic and nongovernmental organizations to bear on federal land management issues—at regional scales. Twelve federal agencies, including the National Park Service, have joined this system, which gives us access to research, technical support, and education in a cooperative partnership. We encourage all of these agencies to strive to understand the complexities of the resources they manage and to pursue their individual agency missions in a coordi-



nated, complementary way—the beginnings of ecosystem management. A system of 17 Research Learning Centers now supports academic researchers who wish to do research in a national park and share the results with visitors who are interested in science and parks. We now have 78 Canon National Park Science Scholars who have pursued doctoral research in national parks under a generous, merit-based scholarship program sponsored by Canon USA over the last 10 years. In the 11 editions of *Year in Review* we have documented the Park Flight Migratory Bird Program, the new National Cave and Karst Research Institute, a new Social Science Program, the All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory, benefits sharing, a new automated research permit system, Exotic Plant Management Teams, and much more. The National Park Service has made progress of which we all can be proud.

The biggest change in 2006 comes from the enthusiasm of Secretary Kempthorne for setting the stage for the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service in 2016. In his first year as Secretary of the Interior, he has championed the largest NPS base budget increase in our history and a target of \$3 billion in new federal and private-sector funding by 2016. This effort, the *Centennial Challenge*, is, paraphrasing his words, “a big audacious idea” in step with the national park concept and the enduring support of the American public for national parks.

So, I leave with thanks to all contributors, editors, and readers of this log, and to all companions on this journey, and with great optimism for the future of national park resources and their appreciation and enjoyment by all.

Michael Soukup, PhD



Associate Director,  
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October 2007

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*I leave with thanks to all contributors, editors, and readers of this log, and to all companions on this journey.*

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