



The Natural Resources Preservation Program in the Eastern Region

Since 1996, the USGS Office of the Regional Chief Biologist in the Eastern Region has distributed over \$1,000,000 annually through the Natural Resources Preservation Program to fund research in the National Parks.

The Natural Resource Preservation Program (NRPP) was created in 1981 to fund natural resources research and management programs in the National Park Service (NPS). In 1993, research funds associated with NRPP were transferred to the National Biological Survey (NBS) and, in 1996, to the U. S. Geological Survey (USGS) when NBS became the USGS Biological Resources Division (BRD). Identification of research needs through NRPP is a regional responsibility of NPS. Selection and development of research projects is a joint regional responsibility of NPS and USGS. Since 1996, the USGS Office of the Regional Chief Biologist in the Eastern Region (ORCB) has distributed over \$1,000,000 annually through the NRPP program to fund research in National Park units in the NPS's Northeast, Southeast, National Capital, and Midwest Regions.

MOU Signed

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) about the NRPP was signed in February, 1999, by the USGS Regional Chief Biologist, Eastern Region, and the Regional Directors of the four eastern NPS regions. The MOU formalized the program's procedures for setting priorities, administering funds, and selecting scientists to conduct the research.

Identification of Research Needs

Each NPS region is responsible for identifying and setting priorities for its information needs. Potential research projects are requested through a unified call for proposals to be funded in the following fiscal years. The call typically occurs in the spring of each year. NPS units respond by submitting a project statement from their Resource Management Plan, along with other information specified in the unified call.

Each proposal provides sufficient information to accurately characterize the management issue, likely focus, objectives, and approach of the necessary research, and its potential benefits to park operations. It includes a description of any products required and an estimate of the project's cost. The proposal does not include detailed information on scientific methods, hypotheses, or a detailed budget. A proposal that has been jointly developed by two or more parks from different USGS regions may only compete in one NPS regional process for funding.

BRD scientists are available to assist park units in identifying their research needs and can aid in developing project statements and NRPP proposals. The ORCB, USGS science centers, and coop-

erative research units can identify appropriate scientists for such consultations.

The science advisors from each of the four NPS regions agree upon the distribution of projects among regions and meet annually to evaluate submissions and rank proposals from the unified call. At an annual joint USGS-NPS meeting, they submit to the ORCB one prioritized list of approved projects. Those projects are initiated as program funding becomes available. Needs and proposals identified through the unified call that are not appropriate for NRPP funding or are not of high enough priority to be selected for funding through the NRPP are transmitted to the ORCB for consideration of funding through other sources.

Selection of Project Coordinators

Once a project is identified for funding, the NPS regional science advisors and the Regional Chief Biologist designate a project coordinator from each agency. The coordinators work together to determine the most effective way to meet the NRPP need. They agree on a scope of work, based upon the approved NRPP proposal that can be used in the selection of a qualified principal investigator, and for the development of an appropriate study plan.

The NPS project coordinator can be from a region, support office, or park and must be able to coordinate NPS field level involvement. The BRD project coordinator can be from a regional office, science center, or cooperative research unit and must be able to coordinate BRD field level involvement. However, in order to avoid a conflict of interest, the BRD coordinator cannot be a potential project investigator. Typically, the initial NPS project coordinator is a regional science advisor and the coordination responsibility

is generally given to park science staff after the principal investigator is selected. Similarly, the BRD project coordination is initially assigned to science staff from the ORCB, with coordination responsibility assigned to a science center research manager or cooperative unit leader after the principal investigator is selected.

Selection of Principal Investigators

The BRD coordinator identifies scientists from USGS science centers and cooperative research units who have the necessary training, expertise, logistical support, and location to successfully design and carry out the research necessary to meet the objectives of the approved project. The principal investigator may be selected from this list, with the agreement of the NPS coordinator, or a subset of these scientists may be offered the chance to compete for the project by submitting study plans based upon the approved NRPP proposal. It should not be assumed that scientists who may have assisted the NPS in preparing the original NRPP proposal would conduct the research project.

Only if the project coordinators agree that the necessary expertise does not exist within USGS will potential investigators from other organizations (federal, university, or private sector) be identified and given the opportunity to compete for the project. The project coordinators must mutually agree upon which scientific institutions and scientists will be asked to prepare and submit study plans and the degree of competition to be used in the selection. In this case, an effort will be made to include a BRD scientist at some level on the study team, as agreed upon by the principal investigator.

Study Plan Development, Review and Approval

The principal investigator is responsible for the development of a study plan based on the approved NRPP proposal. The study plan must accomplish the management objectives of and include the products identified in the proposal as modified by the scope of work agreed to by the project coordinators. Study plans include all information required for a scientific peer review and subsequent management review. This information includes a

problem definition, objectives, proposed methods, expected products, schedule, detailed budget, and literature citations.

The budget for the study plan must be within 10% of the project estimate from the original NRPP proposal. Any changes in a project budget up to 10% may be made at the discretion of the Regional Chief Biologist, but must be reported to the NPS regional science advisors. If the plan's budget is significantly higher (>10%) than the project proposal estimate, the NPS may negotiate with the Regional Chief Biologist to request a new study plan, redefine the scope of work, reprioritize the proposal, or withdraw the proposal from further consideration.

Scientists may propose to accomplish additional but related scientific objectives as they undertake an NRPP project, but meeting those objectives is secondary to meeting the need identified by the approved project proposal. Collateral objectives must not adversely impact the project's ability to fully address the primary objectives and must not require additional NRPP funding. Collateral objectives must be approved by the project coordinators and discussed in the study plan.

The BRD project coordinator is responsible for overseeing the study plan review and approval process, for compiling all required project documentation, and for submitting the necessary documentation to the ORCB. This process includes a formal peer review managed according to BRD standard operating procedures, with the addition that the peer review panel must include at least one NPS-selected scientist. The peer-reviewed and certified study plan must pass a BRD management review (typically, acceptance of the study by the center director) and an NPS management review (to certify that the plan meets the objectives of the original or modified NRPP proposal).

The NPS project coordinator is responsible for selecting at least one peer reviewer and submitting the name to the BRD coordinator. The NPS coordinator is also responsible for obtaining the NPS management review and for supplying review documentation to the BRD project coordinator.

The coordinators are jointly responsible for resolving any management concerns result-

ing from these reviews. Their signatures on the final study plan certify that all scientific and management issues have been resolved and that the study is ready for implementation.

Project Funding

The ORCB distributes funds for approved, properly documented study plans according to the agreed upon annual schedule, and subject to availability. Documentation of completion of the study review process and completion of a BRD Science Information System entry are required before funds will be released. Continuing funding may be withheld if annual reports are not appropriately filed. Since the sum of study plan budgets will rarely match the funding available in any given fiscal year, the Regional Chief Biologist can exercise discretion in the use of unallocated NRPP funds as long as the funds are used for some aspect of the NRPP program. If in any year NRPP program funding is inadequate to cover the cost of all previously approved projects, the ORCB will develop a plan in consultation with the NPS science advisors to mitigate the shortfall.

Project Administration

Once a study plan has been selected, approved, and funded, BRD and NPS project coordinators jointly monitor project progress and products. The BRD project coordinator is responsible for obtaining timely copies of all required deliverables from the principal investigator and forwarding them to the Regional Chief Biologist and the NPS project coordinator. The NPS project coordinator is responsible for distributing products within NPS.

At a minimum, project products include an annual progress report (in the form of an updated Science Information System entry), a draft of the final technical report, the final technical report, and an oral presentation by the principal investigator to NPS managers describing the study's results and management implications. Annual reports are due by December 31 of each year until the project is completed. The final project report must undergo peer review and management review before its official release. The review process is similar to that used for study plans. The project coordinators are jointly responsible for scheduling the oral presentation of the final study results.