



# The US National Park Service's partnership parks: collaborative responses to middle landscapes

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## Abstract

Historically, the US National Park Service (NPS) has been an uneasy, often unwelcome, presence in rural communities. Broader recent acceptance of non-traditional types of national park units has opened the door to more positive collaborative relationships between the NPS and rural communities. I present three case studies of 'partnership parks' that vary from extensive federal land ownership while retaining traditional land uses to virtually no federal land ownership where achievement of unit goals rests on developing locally collaborative relationships. Reasons for the change are presented, and lessons for new partnership park units are explored. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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## Introduction

Historically, many members of rural communities viewed pronouncements of proposed national park designation as the voice of doom. When the federal government determined that the area belonged in protected status, it meant that soon the in-holding residents would probably leave, whether because of eminent domain purchases, in response to the enticements of profiting from the federal purchase price, or out of desire to avoid dealing with the federal government. If they stayed, they would likely face significant restrictions on the use and development of their property and the slow death of their community as neighbors moved away. If their livelihood depended on access to federal lands, such as for mining or ranching, the picture was often even bleaker. These middle landscapes, the pastoral result of human-nature interactions, were destined to return to something approximating 'pure nature'.

For residents on the outskirts of national park units and in parks' gateway communities, in contrast, the results of a new park designation were often far from bleak; land values rose, tourism brought new jobs and development, and residents' recreational access was often improved and permanently guaranteed (Bratton, 1985;

Carls, 1985). Many urban areas have fought to get national park units designated nearby, to assure federal money flows, tourism, and land protection. Nevertheless, for rural communities the real cost to inholders and the fears evoked by the big foot of federal government usually meant they fought heart and soul to prevent national park designation. Given the negative image of park designation among rural residents, the planner who suggested bringing the park service to their area would likely be looking for a new job.

As a result, for planners planning for national park lands has not been of great concern unless one worked in a gateway community or was employed by the National Park Service (NPS).<sup>1</sup> This was so also because of the inward nature of park management philosophy. Parks tended to be made up of fully federal lands with just a few inholders, and park superintendents were concerned almost exclusively with management within their park boundaries.

An important trend has emerged for national park designation, however. New types of park units and new purposes for parks have been developing in the last ten years, along with different approaches to land tenure on

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<sup>1</sup> National forests are not units of the NPS or its parent department, the Department of the Interior. Instead, they are managed by the National Forest Service, which is under the purview of the Department of Agriculture.

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the part of the park service. The term the NPS uses is ‘partnership parks’. Zube (1992) identifies five forms of partnerships, including contracting with concessionaires or local governments for services, having a friends group run a unit’s bookstore (e.g., Friends of the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve) or provide other educational material, the NPS providing technical assistance to state or local parks, and sharing responsibility for resource ownership or management. In this paper, I focus on the later form of partnership, and specifically address park units that require significant cooperation between non-profit groups, land-users, local residents or their governments and the NPS unit to achieve the unit’s particular management goals, and that involve very limited acquisition of land by the NPS. I use the term ‘park’ or ‘park unit’ to generically describe designated units affiliated with the national park system.<sup>2</sup>

At its heart, the movement toward partnership parks reflects the fractured reality of a postmodern world, and particularly one in which power is shared (Bryson and Crosby, 1992). Expertise in this reality is no guarantee of good policy outcomes, because the power to influence both the timing and success of implementation resides not with experts, but with those most affected by a policy (Lake, 1986). In a partnership park, rather than having the community on the outside looking in, the community becomes central to determining management directions. It thus, in outline at least, accords well with the sort of bottom-up citizen-driven planning and empowerment espoused by theorists such as Sandercock (1998) or protected area authors such as McNeely (1995). In particular, collaborative processes of the sort favored in recent planning theory (e.g., Innes, 1993; Healey, 1997; Forester, 1999) become central to management of the park—a clear contrast to typical park management styles of the past.

The upshot of these new approaches to park unit designation is that the primary drawbacks to park designation, the reduction of private property and loss of local control, have been greatly reduced for new units that fit in the partnership model. Many of the traditional benefits of being part of the national park system—increased tourism, federal largesse, prestige, permanent protection for ecological and recreational areas—remain, albeit somewhat reduced. And some new types of benefits may accrue to certain units, including creating a potent tool for regional growth management and a strong supporter of good planning. In this article, I present three newer US parks that fit in the partnership model, and unravel some of the reasons for the philosophical change. For clearest context, I begin with a review of the basics of NPS designation.

<sup>2</sup> Many parks are not federal, and partnerships are also used in some non-federal protected lands. See for example Michaels, Mason et al. (1999).

## NPS designations

By the end of 1998, the US NPS contained 375 areas totaling more than 83 million acres in 49 states, the District of Columbia, and many US territories (Office of Public Affairs, Division of Publications et al., 1999). Additions to the NPS generally occur through Congressional legislation. Typically, achieving a designation requires the support of both home-state US Senators and at least some of the state’s US Representatives, as well as the President who must ultimately sign the bill. The NPS may or may not be in favor of an addition; if the home-state elected officials pushing for a bill are sufficiently powerful or persuasive, the NPS may be forced to accept units it would rather not have. Nevertheless, designations go more easily if the Department of the Interior, to whom the NPS reports, is in favor of the unit (Lowry, 1998; Hamin, 2001b).

In general, the park service’s 1916 originating legislation (the Organic Act) created a dual mandate for park service management of units: “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (39 Stat. 535). Within these general and often conflicting goals lies a great deal of room for interpretation regarding appropriate management actions. The actual rules under which a unit is governed depends, as noted by Dilsaver, on

A whole hierarchy of policy controls that begin with the government-wide controls such as NEPA, then descends to the Organic Act, individual park founding legislation, NPS management policies which reflect and elaborate the above legislation, and finally individual park policies. The latter often reflect the unwritten agency traditions of what a national park should be and how it should be run (1994, p. 4).

Currently there are more than 20 separate categories of units (Dilsaver, 1994). *National park* is the most prestigious unit designation, saved for the ‘crown jewels’ of the park system. It is also the designation that usually implies the most restrictive management, disallowing all hunting, most grazing, and permitting only heavily regulated mining. *National monuments* tend to be smaller, designed to preserve at least one nationally significant resource. National monuments are the exception to Congressional designation of park units; Presidents may single-handedly create national monuments on lands that are already federal. For both of these designations most land is federally owned and there tend to be very few in-holding residents.

While national park and national monument are the most famous designations, partnership parks use different titles. The first *national preserves* were created in

1974. This designation is usually for areas that already have significant uses such as hunting, mining, and oil and gas exploration, and where those uses will continue under NPS management (Bratton, 1985; Carls, 1985). *National seashores and lakeshores* protect shoreline and offshore islands. They often have extensive local in-holdings.

Many partnership parks fall under the general category of ‘affiliated area’—not quite part of the park system, but instead related to it. *National rivers and wild and scenic riverways* protect ribbons of land alongside free-flowing streams (see Office of Public Affairs, Division of Publications et al., 1999). *National heritage areas and corridors* have become a key designation for partnership-style parks. The first of these was the Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor, which was designated in 1984 (National Park Service, 1999a).

Definitions of heritage corridors and heritage areas are evolving, but generally these areas represent large, identifiable, and diverse landscapes with many significant resources and themes. They function through partnerships of all levels of community and government and are operated to coordinate public enjoyment of unique resources while respecting the integrity of private ownership and control. (National Park Service, 1999a)

Federal ownership of land in the heritage areas and corridors may be limited or zero. Their management goals have included economic development and preserving important resource and community values (National Park Service, 1999a).<sup>3</sup> Fifteen of these units had been designated by the end of the Congressional session of 1998 (US Department of the Interior, 1999). All are located in the east of the country, where there is much, much less federal land than in the west—and thus much less opportunity to easily create traditional, federally-owned park system units.

### Partnership parks

In the partnership parks, the NPS shares responsibility for management and ownership of protected lands, and works collaboratively with private groups, either individual landowners, non-profits, governments, or corporations, to create a more extensive area of land protection. In some cases this means funneling federal money into local environmental efforts or working on planning and education issues in collaboration

with local institutions. Where there is already federal land, it may mean maintaining traditional use of the land, including ranching, farming, and even mining, but working closely with the inholding land users to assure ecological protection. What all of these cases share is very limited or no new federal acquisition of land. This can allow the existing community to remain in place, and potentially even thrive as increased tourism is added to the mix of more traditional economic uses in the area.

This sort of designation is not appropriate for relatively pristine and uninhabited landscapes. Instead, it is for areas with important ecological characteristics that are inhabited and have a history of productive use—what Zimmerer (2000) terms “nature-society hybrids”. Accordingly, the goals will not be for the same high level of ecological protection that we expect in classic national parks; instead, preservation of the ecology is balanced with sustaining residents’ social and economic needs. Often, the local economic activities support the existing local ecology and the social aspects thus become part of conservation efforts.

The basic premise of these parks is finding consensus-based and collaborative decisions. The park service has long included the public and its representatives in management of individual units, usually through an advisory council made up of a mix of government, private organizations, and land-owners (e.g., Appalachian National Scenic Trail established in 1968 (Dilsaver, 1994)). The level of actual local control this creates varies significantly from place to place, as most regulations only require that the park administration ‘consult’ with the advisory council, and councils typically meet only once a month. In partnership parks, local control is legislated to be greater. In the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, a case further discussed below, there is Coordinating Commission whose purpose is to “assist Federal, State and local authorities in the development and implementation of an integrated resource plan”. Of the Commission’s 22 members, four are citizens from the general public and the rest represent various government entities (Mississippi River Coordinating Commission and National Park Service, 1995, p. 77). Similarly, the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor has a 19-member commission with a responsibility to “provide a management framework to assist the states and their units of local government in the development and implementation of integrated cultural, historical, and land resource management programs (US National Park Service and Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, 2000).” Of the nineteen members, the majority represent units of government, while four are members of the public at large.

In the partnership units, the role of the commission is supposed to be central to determining management direction, in part because by definition partnership units

<sup>3</sup> The NPS is not the only federal partnership that planners may wish to consider. The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA) is effectively a federally mandated regional planning effort. A commission oversees planning for 149,004 acres of mostly private land in conjunction with the Forest Service. Specified urban areas are exempt from the plans but by cooperating they become eligible for federal grants. See Abbott, Adler et al. (1997) for an excellent detailed case study of the CRGNSA.

that lack local support and acceptance cannot be successful. Nevertheless, one can note in the legislating language that the Commissions still only ‘assist’. They do not create or approve, only provide guidance to the professional staff from the NPS. As noted by Arnstein (1969), public participation should be evaluated on the ability to change the outcome—by the public’s power to decide. Decision power even in these partnership units appears to remain with the NPS—an outcome which may well be appropriate given the premise that those who must bear the long-term responsibility for outcomes (i.e., the NPS) ought to have the final decision power.

### Administrative legacy

The partnership park concept is a clear descendent of the greenline parks movement of the 1970s and 1980s, most famously identified in Corbett and Batcher (1983). Charles Little defined greenline parks as:

Sizable areas, still in relatively natural condition, designated by state legislators for recreational management with special emphasis on service to urban populations. . . . greenline parks are a mix of public and private land, controlled and managed to maintain existing recreational, scenic, environmental and cultural values (as quoted in Mason, 1994).

Central to the greenline concept is active federal acquisition of the land (Mason, 1994); examples include Cape Cod National Seashore<sup>4</sup> and the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, are discussed later in this paper. Additionally, most of these were imagined to be peri-urban, providing recreation for the masses (Mason, 1994). Perhaps the most famous NPS greenline park is the Pinelands National Reserve. Designated part of the US park system in 1978 and awarded Biosphere Reserve status in 1983 (US Department of the Interior, 1999), this unit is unique among the national parks. Its central management tool is a strong regional plan designating growth areas and preservation areas, and utilizing transfer of development rights to compensate those who experience property value losses resulting from down-zoning. One of the Pineland’s management goals is preservation of local culture and local economic opportunity.

<sup>4</sup> Arguably, Cape Cod National Seashore was the first “partnership park”. Designated in 1961, it was the first national park unit to require a citizens advisory commission in its designating legislation. While the goal of the legislation appears to have been for the park service to acquire all lands within the boundaries of the unit, if property was included in an approved municipal zoning program, it could not be acquired by condemnation. The result is that the park has a significant number of inholders and must cooperate with local towns. The park unit’s success set an important precedent for the current batch of partnership park units. See Foster (1985). I do not include it here as a partnership park because of the park’s significant federal land acquisition.

While the exact structure of the Pinelands has not been repeated elsewhere, its lessons have remained highly influential in the partnership parks approach.<sup>5</sup>

In the Reagan-White House years, additions to the NPS were generally opposed (Lowry, 1998), and so the greenline park ideal went largely dormant.<sup>6</sup> The partnership parks idea, as heir to the greenline movement, reflects many of the same goals but pursues them with a greater diversity of techniques in response to local conditions and local desires, and by eschewing land acquisition, avoids the most politically problematic part of traditional park designation.

### Park service partnerships with working lands residents

The case studies that follow present three partnership parks representing federal, land trust, and private land ownership structures. Each case suggests some of the political and geographic reasons why that particular designation was the final outcome. The case study findings are based on published and unpublished literature and personal observation supplemented by interviews with park personnel and others important to that particular case.<sup>7</sup> Park unit designations are individually unique processes, so these are not presented as ‘representative’ cases; instead, they suggest the sorts of issues and possibilities inherent in this model.

#### I. Case 1: Federal land ownership, traditional uses—the Mojave National Preserve

In 1994, President Clinton signed the California Desert Protection Act into law, upgrading and expanding Joshua Tree and Death Valley National Monuments to National Parks, and creating the Mojave National Preserve (MNP). The MNP is about 1.5 million acres of searing brown desert interspersed with beautiful oases and dramatic hills. The vast majority of the land in the preserve area is ranched, although because the conditions are so difficult, fewer than 3400 cattle (US National Park Service, n.d.) are actually grazed by about ten families total (Hamin, 2001b). A fair bit of small game hunting also occurs, with quail, rabbits and the occasional mule deer as the main targets; a few coyotes and bobcats are

<sup>5</sup> Much has been written about the Pinelands; examples include Berger and Sinton (1985), Collins and Russell (1988), and Mason (1992).

<sup>6</sup> Although Mason (1994), for instance, discusses greenline park futures as a current potential, including the national heritage corridors under the greenline name. Nevertheless, almost all greenline publications are dated in the 1970s and 1980s (Little, 1992). There is, therefore, no consensus that the greenline park movement is over.

<sup>7</sup> Interviews were undertaken in the summer of 1999, and were taped and transcribed. Drafts of this paper were sent to interviewees at Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve and Mississippi National River and Recreation Area for their review to assure the accuracy of the information and my citations of their perspectives.

trapped each year. More politically important in the fight over the designation were the 10 or so big horn sheep that the California State Department of Fish and Wildlife permits to be hunted each year; these are potent prizes for big-game hunters. The Mojave area has long been a rich source of minerals, although in recent years actual working claims consist of a few major corporate mines with smaller local operations few and far between. Virtually all of the Mojave lands were already federal, but at the time of the designation they were managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which is another branch of the Department of the Interior. (Hamin, 2001b).<sup>8</sup>

A curious thing happened during the negotiations surrounding getting the act passed. Park proponents, who included the major environmental groups such as the Sierra Club and Wilderness Society, pushed to get the Mojave protected at the highest possible level—as a national park. Park opponents, who included traditional use groups such as the mining industry, cattlemen's association, and pro-hunting groups as well as many local residents, instead argued hard against any inclusion in the NPS. Each side ended up with a partial victory, and a partial defeat. Under the compromise rules Congress laid out in the preserve's authorizing act, ranching and hunting will continue virtually unchanged; some mining may continue, but it will be regulated under the strict mining in the Parks Act of 1976. While in the past the park service has managed incidental grazing or hunting, in the Mojave it becomes a central part of the management role. Because so much of the preserve is under private use and management, working with grazers, miners and homeowners will be central to achieving park unit goals (Hamin, 2001b).

One of the reasons why in the end this compromise was acceptable to the pro-park environmentalists may have to do with the reasons for wanting the land protected in the first place. The Mojave is located directly between the sprawling megalopolis of Las Vegas and Los Angeles, and directly in the path of growth for each of them. Park proponents never publicly asserted that one purpose of the Mojave designation was to place a measure of growth control on those two expansive desert cities. But in series of interviews, persons outside of NPS management but active both for and against the designation suggested that a significant goal of the bill was growth management for the southwestern

desert.<sup>9</sup> By placing the land under park service management, proponents could assure that a big brown belt placed strategically between the two metropolitan areas would prevent the eventual development of one massive, continuous sprawl (Hamin, 2001b).

## II. Case 2: *NPS/Private Land Trust Collaboration—the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve*

Another of the park system's newer units is also a national preserve, the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in the Flint Hills of Kansas. In the Preserve, the main partner is the National Park Trust (NPT), an offspring of the National Parks and Conservation Association, a national park supporter and watchdog group. Most of what the NPT does is purchase land and easements in or adjacent to national parks, and then sell or donate the land to the federal government for permanent protection (Zurhellen, 1999). In 1994 NPT purchased the 10,894 acre Z Bar Ranch outside Strong City, Kansas with the intent of donating it to the NPS, who in a 1991 report had favorably reviewed the land for addition to the national park system (Tallgrass Historians, 1998). It was not until 1996 that Congress passed the Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act (P.L. 104-333), which created the new national preserve. The conditions attached to the designation include that federal land ownership cannot go over 180 acres to be acquired by donation (from NPT); that the property be managed in conjunction with the property owner (NPT); and that the NPS pays in-lieu-of fees to replace any lost property taxes. Republican US Representatives hoped that the Preserve would be self-supporting, and required that a financial plan for paying management costs through fees, private donations, and other non-federal sources be completed as part of the planning process (Zurhellen, 1999, P.L. 104-333). While the NPT remains the primary landowner, the NPS currently provides the management on most of the land, whether owned by them or by the NPT, and eventually the NPS will provide all of the land management (Zurhellen, 1999).

The effort to get a remnant prairie national park has roots that go back to the 1920s, and has resurfaced periodically since then. Generally, environmentalists were in favor of a prairie park, some local governments were in favor of some of the various proposals that were made over the years, and state senators tended to favor the idea. The park service welcomed the idea of a prairie park, because tall grass prairie is one of the most under-protected biome types in the country. Many local

<sup>8</sup> For the Mojave research, I interviewed 42 individuals active in the designation debate, including Washington, DC based lobbyists as well as desert-area residents in 1995 and 1996. Relevant key original literature sources include: US National Park Service (n.d.), US and Bureau of Land Management (1980), US National Park Service (1987), US and Bureau of Land Management (1988), US Congress, Committee on Natural Resources (1994). Drafts of the original research were sent back to interviewees for their review (see Hamin, 2001b).

<sup>9</sup> Because of the political sensitivity of this observation, respondents are kept anonymous. Comments to this effect were voiced in interviews with lobbyists for national advocacy groups, NPS personnel who did not work at the Mojave unit, and by one fairly senior person who worked for the BLM and later worked directly for the Department of the Interior.

ranchers were strongly opposed, believing that they had been very good stewards of the land and that a federal presence was unnecessary and unwelcome. That opposition was staunch enough that over the many years that such legislation was proposed, there was never full agreement by Kansas' federally elected officials. The impasse was finally broken when Senator Nancy Kassebaum brought together representatives from opposing sides to develop a consensus plan; that process took from December 1991 to January 1994. The outcome of those discussions was a decision that ownership by a private nonprofit organization would be acceptable (Tallgrass Historians, 1998).

It appears that there were two key conditions the preserve had to meet to become acceptable to local residents. The first is that the majority of the land had to be owned by someone other than the federal government, and that it stay on local tax roles (Tallgrass Historians, 1998).<sup>10</sup> The second is that initial management of that land not stray too far from local norms (Donaldson, 1999). At this time, there is a grazing lease on virtually all of the preserve land, and many of the management practices of the lessee, which include annual burns, are typical for the area. The park service's General Management Plan (GMP) calls for varying the burn schedule to increase habitat diversity.<sup>11</sup> The GMP also calls for the introduction of a small bison herd on part of the property with the herd anticipated to increase with time, while most of the property would remain in cattle grazing. Having some sort of ungulate grazing is central to the ecological health of prairie ecosystems, and interpretation of the legacy of ranching is an important goal of the unit (Donaldson, 1999; Miller, 1999). There had been concern among area ranchers that the only heritage that the NPS would consider important enough for interpretation was that of the Native Americans. The decision to include interpretation of white settlers' culture in the mission of the park helped to make ranchers feel that the park was for them as well as for tourists (Tallgrass Historians, 1998).

It is unclear at this time if the sort of model presented by this national preserve, with a private non-profit owning the majority of the land and the park service doing the majority of the management and interpretation, is one that will be used again in the future. There are fundraising advantages, as a private organization can seek federal and grant money for which a federal agency could not qualify

(Zurhellen, 1999). The NPT would need to increase its administrative and financial capacity to take on additional properties in a similar sort of arrangement (Zurhellen, 1999). Other non-profits could take on a similar role, although it would be important that their goals closely match those of the NPS. Interestingly, the local populace may actually have less assurance that the area of protected land will not expand beyond its initial boundaries when it is a private trust; for national park units, expanding official boundaries requires an Act of Congress, while no such assurance can be mandated for private organizations. Still, in cases where opposition to land protection rests largely on opposition to the federal government *qua* federal government, this is a promising example.

### III. Case 3: Private Land Ownership, Federal Collaboration—the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

The Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA) stretches along 72 miles of the Mississippi River beginning in basically rural environments, running through the metropolitan areas of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, and back out to rural areas. Only 43 acres of the 54,000 acres included in the MNRRA boundaries are NPS land. This unit is the star of partnership models for the NPS, as developing cooperative relationships with and between the 30 local governments and many nonprofit groups within their boundaries is central to its management goals (National Park Service, 1999c).

In 1980, Congress authorized the Metropolitan River Corridors Study Committee to recommend ways to protect and manage the resource values of the three major rivers in the Twin Cities region. The resulting 1986 study suggested that coordination and consistency along the Mississippi River were lacking, and in 1988 the legislation authorizing the MNRRA was passed (Mississippi River Coordinating Commission and National Park Service, 1995). It passed despite opposition from the NPS, who under the administration of President Bush had testified against the unit's designation (Kyril, 1999). Local concerns included municipal governments' fears that they would lose control of land-use zoning and administration; property rights concern; and fear that the park unit would interfere with economically important barge shipping. Additionally, the Corps of Engineers opposed the designation because they felt it would reduce their power and autonomy in the area (Kyril, 1999).

The MNRRA was established in 1988 under Public Law 100-696 with three goals: (1) to protect, preserve and enhance the significant values of the Mississippi River corridor through the Twin Cities metropolitan area; (2) to encourage coordination of federal, state, and local programs; and (3) to provide a management framework to assist the state of Minnesota and units of local government in the development and implementation of integrated resource management programs.

<sup>10</sup> Lands owned by the national government are not subject to local property tax; this is an oft-cited reason for local opposition to NPS designation. The NPS does typically pay in-lieu of fees, however, that serve much the same purpose as property taxes.

<sup>11</sup> At the time of this writing, the GMP is in draft form. The cited plans for burns and bison are those stated in the Draft Preferred Alternative, available at <http://nps.gov/tapr/home.htm>. According to Miller and Donaldson, the draft preferred alternative has a high likelihood of being the final version of the GMP.

The design of the legislation responds to many of the concerns of those who had opposed the legislation. The legislation specifically says that the NPS will work with and honor local plans, and will provide grants to state or local governments to achieve the purposes of the MNRRA plan. The ability of the NPS to purchase land from unwilling sellers is limited to situations where local plans are not made, enforced, or when such a purchase is the only way to prevent a use in substantial conflict with the MNRRA plan. The Corps of Engineers is included on the 22-member coordinating commission responsible for guiding the NPS in creation of its management plans, and the legislation says that the NPS will not interfere with the Corps' work unless it specifically conflicts with plan goals (P.L. 100-696).

The MNRRA plan that was completed in 1995 envisions a "continuous linear<sup>12</sup> open space and trail along the riverfront in most of the corridor while protecting natural, cultural, and economic resources" (Mississippi River Coordinating Commission and National Park Service, 1995, p. v). Perhaps the key activity so far has been incentive grants to local communities to review or initiate plans and ordinances to comply with state requirements for critical area plans. These relate to the Minnesota Critical Areas Act of 1973, which provided management standards for areas designated as critical; in 1991, the state legislature included all of the MNRRA within a critical area. If towns choose to go further than the guidelines in the Critical Areas Act and incorporate policies laid out in the MNRRA's Comprehensive Plan, they may qualify for project development and acquisition funds (Metropolitan Council, 1996). We see here an intriguing model of funneling federal funds to meet environmental planning goals, while relying solely on existing regulations and carrots, rather than sticks.

### Reasons for changing patterns of practice

The changes in philosophy heralded by the partnership approach can be traced to a combination of NPS and Department of Interior conditions as well as broader demographic, social and intellectual changes. The key factors include: negative public and legislative relations from previous aggressive land purchase programs; learning from international experiences; reductions in funding for federal land acquisition; increased acceptance of ecosystem planning at the highest levels of the federal government; application of the theory of island biogeography to the national parks; changes in the economy and related social perspectives on land protection and use; and a set of secondary, but still important, social and geographic conditions. These are further described below.

### IV. History—making enemies rather than friends

Throughout most of the history of the park service, the complex web of legislative direction and agency tradition regarding management has encouraged a goal of maximizing park service control within its units, typically through full ownership of the land. Historically, this caused only minor trouble. Particularly beginning in the 1970s, however, local residents and inholders facing national park designation began to make this approach difficult and politically costly to the NPS. The designation of the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area (CVNRA) provides an example of how the park service used to operate, as well as arguably being the watershed event after which the park service began to change its approach. For both these reasons, it is helpful to consider the case in some detail.

The CVNRA protects about 18,000 acres of urban land lying in the Cuyahoga River valley between Cleveland and Akron, Ohio. The NPS had strongly opposed the designation largely because they did not want to open a floodgate such that every state expected an urban park (Cockrell and National Park Service, 1992, p. 84–111). In spite of this, in 1974 Congress designated the CVNRA a part of the NPS. The purposes of the recreation area were to preserve and protect "for public use and enjoyment, the historic, scenic, natural, and recreational values of the Cuyahoga River" (P.L. 93–555). There was no existing federal land in the CVNRA's area. Instead, the park service was charged with gaining control of the lands it judged necessary to fulfill the goals of the legislation. This it proceeded to do. Through willing sellers or eminent domain, the NPS acquired control of roughly 18,000 acres either through fee-simple purchases or acquiring easements to limit the use of the land.

The end result of the land purchase program at the CVNRA was to create a classic kind of park, removing virtually all uses except for recreation. Many pastoral and historic settlement areas were eliminated (Hemmat, 1986). Vacant homes fell into abandon and existing communities became unsustainable as the population dropped. The process of land acquisition was badly handled, resulting in the hardening of inholder opinions against the park service.<sup>13</sup> The Public Broadcasting System did a Frontline special on the heavy-handed land acquisition at CVNRA, and experience there became a battle call among inholders, demonstrating why they should oppose having lands become part of the park service. Rightly or wrongly, the Park Service experienced a public-relations nightmare beyond any in their recent experience (Cockrell and National Park Service, 1992). Ironically, while urban Cleveland and Akron

<sup>12</sup> "linal" (*sic*) in the original.

<sup>13</sup> This was not altogether the park service's fault. Much of the early land acquisition program was handled by the Corps of Engineers, and it was during their reign that much of the bad blood developed (Cockrell and National Park Service, 1992).

metropolitan areas got a beautiful park, they lost one of their last connecting links with the area's heritage as an agricultural community.

Park designations occur because, as noted above, elected officials want them to occur, and the park service depends on the goodwill of federal legislators for appropriations. People do not go into the park service to be disliked. For all of these reasons, it must have been very uncomfortable to become the bad guy in the public's eye. It is not surprising that the park service, along with legislators, began to search for alternative ways to handle land acquisition and the creation of new units.

### V. *International learning*

To find new examples, NPS administrators had only to look across the Atlantic. The primary form of national park in much of Europe is the protected landscape, which Halvorson (1996) working from Lucas (1992) describes these this way:

The protected landscape concept reinforces the positive aspects of relationships between humans and nature and ameliorates negative influences that may damage or destroy the harmony between them. At the same time, the goal of protected landscapes is to provide opportunities for the public to visit and experience natural areas in ways that enhance the local economy but do not harm the landscape's natural, cultural, and social values. (p. 20)<sup>14</sup>

All English national parks and French regional parks are made up of primarily private lands that are managed to retain and enhance the landscape. Zoning power typically remains with the local authority, but development approvals must meet more stringent criteria identified in a park plan, and sometimes must achieve direct approval from the park planning administrator. Goals for the units include retention of the beauty of the landscape and access for the public to recreate on the lands; management often addresses ecological issues. In both the British and French examples, an additional management goal is retention of the local population and culture, and in some parks in other European countries as well (Foster, Phillips et al., 1982; Foster, 1988; Dower, 1995; Bromley, 1997; Gambino, 1998; Beresford and Phillips, 2000; Hamin, 2001a).

Issues of significance to park managers were occurring farther afield as well. There is a significant movement in both practice and research toward encouraging greater

local resident power and participation in park management in developing countries (see, for example McNeely, 1995; Furze, Lacy et al., 1996; Brandon, Redford et al. 1998; Stolton and Dudley, 1999). This results from an increased awareness that local people have it in their power to seriously disrupt achieving management incentives if they do not support them, through poaching, for instance. Also, there is an increased awareness of equity issues (West and Brechlin, 1991); the land which becomes a park has been, in almost all cases, land that someone relied upon for a living, and wholesale disruptions to indigenous populations is hardly ethically recommended. Methods of undertaking environmental protection that support, rather than undermine, local culture has thus become a topic of great current interest.

The echo in the US partnership parks model is no coincidence. NPS administrators participated and continue to participate in international conferences and international partnerships designed to expand knowledge of protected landscapes (Foster, Phillips et al., 1982; Bray, 1998; Hall, 1998), and Mason (1994) notes that the British examples were important in influencing the green-line parks movement. Through the auspices of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature as well as other organizations such as the George Wright Forum, there has been an internationalization of park management studies and collaborations, and this has influenced US policy.

### VI. *Administrative support and funding—losing the LWC funds*

The time from the 1970s to the 1990s marked a significant shift in Presidential administrations. 1980 marked the first year of Ronald Reagan's presidency, a term notable for its anti-government stance and opposition to expansion of the public domain. Reagan's federal lands philosophy was largely mirrored in the Bush administration, which ended in 1992 (Shabecoff, 1993). One outcome of that administrative philosophy was the decline in the major funding source for acquisition of lands by the park service, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

That fund was established in 1964 to pay for the acquisition of lands for recreation at the local, state and federal levels. Initially, the fund had three sources of revenue: proceeds from sales of surplus Federal real property, motorboat fuel taxes and fees for recreation use of Federal lands. After 1968, Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) mineral leasing receipts were available as well. The peak of LWCF funding occurred in 1979, with \$369 million appropriated by Congress. Appropriations fell off dramatically in the 1980s, and by 1995, the appropriation level for the NPS was zero—the level at which it remained through 1999. In fiscal 2000, however, \$40 million was appropriated for the fund (Nixon, 1998; National Park Service, 1999b).

<sup>14</sup> Protected landscapes are management category V according to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) divisions of protected areas. The IUCN has indicated support for protected landscapes as a central component of protecting biodiversity as well as indigenous lifeways. See Foster (1988) or Lucas (1992).



Under the Clinton administration, there has been more appetite for increasing the NPS, as witnessed by the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 and the designation of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in 1996 (Watkins, 1999). The reality of a Republican majority in Congress has meant, however, little growth in funding for the overall system and little money for acquisitions (Nixon, 1998). As a result, the NPS' ability to undertake land acquisition has been necessarily limited.

### VII. *Administrative philosophies—ecosystem planning*

A subtler but also significant change was in the works in the late 1980s and 1990s. This was the movement toward ecosystem management among the federal land management agencies. There are a variety of definitions for ecosystem management, but the Interagency Ecosystem Management Task Force, representing managers from all the major federal departments defined the goal of ecosystem management as:

To restore and maintain the health, sustainability, and biological diversity of ecosystems while supporting sustainable economies and communities ... the ecosystem approach integrates ecological, economic, and social factors that affect a management unit defined by ecological—not political—boundaries. (1995, p. 1)

From a federal perspective, perhaps the most important aspect of the ecosystem approach is a commitment for agencies to work together collaboratively, as well as working with non-governmental agencies and the public (Interagency Ecosystem Management Task Force, 1995). In the park service, the result of this philosophic shift was a reinterpretation of their role as managers of isolated preservation areas to partners and collaborators in managing entire ecosystems, much of which are located outside of NPS boundaries (Commission on Research and Resource Management Policy in the National Park System, 1989; Cortner and Moote, 1999).<sup>15</sup> The partnership parks model appears a natural outgrowth of this philosophy (Cortner and Moote, 1999).

### VIII. *New Science—biogeography*

Related to the acceptance of ecosystem management are changes in widespread understanding of the effects of geographic isolation on species survival. This theory comes from the fields of conservation biology and landscape ecology. As Duane describes it:

The theory of island biogeography states that the viability of specific populations of organisms on island systems is a function primarily of the size of the island

and its proximity to the mainland. Smaller islands support smaller populations, increasing the risks of extinction (Duane, 1999, p. 225)

This was applied to the national parks by William Newmark (1987), as Duane notes. Newmark demonstrated that:

The loss of biodiversity at the species level in national parks of the American West was directly correlated with both the size of the parks and their age since establishment ... rais(ing) the specter of long-term depletion of the national park's (*sic*) ecological assemblages and functions. This raised new questions about how the "sea" of surrounding land was being managed as well as the viability of any biodiversity conservation strategy focused primarily on protected area refugia (Duane, 1999, p. 228)

Additionally, around this time several influential studies reported on the extent and severity of threats to the integrity of park units from sources outside the park's boundaries (Freemuth, 1991; Frome, 1992). The result was increasing awareness that park management had to be concerned with more than what happened within the unit's boundaries.<sup>16</sup>

### IX. *Economy—New West vs. Old West*

The West, where much of the NPS's land is located, can be understood to be undergoing a transition from Old West to New West. Old Westerners depend directly on extractive or resource-based industries—mining, ranching, agriculture, and their associated processing. They are truly rural folks, and typically share a culture of discomfort with large organizations and bureaucracies. For them, the NPS remains an undesired partner. New Westerners are, however, in the ascendancy economically and socially. They are characterized by cosmopolitan attitudes with little connection to local resource-based economies. For these folks, land protection is very favorable and is conducive rather than disruptive to leading their lives (Abbott, Adler et al. 1997).

As the demographic balance in areas 'tips' from Old to New West, we can expect an easier time bringing NPS protection into an area. This sort of community is likely to be easier for the park service to work with, because while they may have limited direct knowledge of the landscape, they generally support ecologically protective

<sup>15</sup> For an example of scientific writing on incorporating ecosystem planning into national parks, see Wright and Lemons (1996).

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, changes in ecological understanding raising awareness of the role of flux and non-equilibrium ecological dynamics may problematize the definition of park boundaries themselves, as noted by Zimmerer (2000). He suggests that in nature-society hybrid conservation areas, boundaries ought to be based on the indigenous people's use patterns rather than invalidated ecological criteria. Nevertheless, as Zimmerer himself states, the ideas of flux have not yet been influential in boundary design or most aspects of human-oriented management.

actions—in part because it causes them no economic harm or ideological conflict. And New Westerners interest in ecology and environment along with a sense of empowerment means that they are more likely to expect that they will be able to influence public processes regarding public lands. The partnership model is without doubt easier where collaborators share values and goals, although not impossible otherwise (Kyril, 1999).

While the movement from Old to New is most obvious in the West, in other parts of the country the transition to a postindustrial economy is likely to have similar consequences. In fact it is in the East and South where the partnership model will likely be most important. These areas have much less federal land than the West, and so creating new parks can rarely be done just by transferring federal land.

#### X. *Other factors—social and geographic*

It is, of course, always risky to try to identify the key forces behind a social change, as simplifying the complexity of history always makes for a somewhat unsatisfying tale, and simplification is central to story-telling. In this particular case, the urban power-base of most Senators brings pressure on the NPS to develop urban parks. There typically is little existing federal land in urban areas, and extensive land purchases are quite expensive. This means that finding alternatives to full federal ownership is necessary if we are going to have new urban parks. And even for areas that are not urban, finding uninhabited landscapes has become quite difficult, and so some provisions for dealing with inholders must be made. Zimmerer (2000) points to increasing globalization of capital encouraging commodification and privatization of nature—forces which would oppose the designation of traditional park types and instead support continued private ownership and use. More generally, the focus on sustainable development, with its three key aspects of environment, economy, and equity (Campbell, 1996), may be a significant influence in the concept of partnership parks.

#### **Prospects for rural communities and the NPS**

The partnership parks have not been in operation long enough to allow full evaluation of their results. Nevertheless, the case studies and literature presented here suggest some identifiable conditions that appear necessary to achieve success in first designating such parks and then creating positive cooperation between the park service and its partners. For the park service to begin considering the area, it must have some outstanding natural resources even if most of the landscape is under cultivation or other traditional use (Wikle, 1991). There will probably need to be some threat, some development pressure on the area, to make both residents and park service personnel pay attention. Residents and govern-

ments in the area must be willing to think regionally as partnership parks typically extend beyond jurisdictional boundaries. And there must be some local civic leaders or other grassroots activists who have a vision of a sustainable rural landscape, and who can reach out to more conservative members of the community as well as to legislators and government representatives.

From the park service's perspective, managing through collaboration requires a different sort of park manager than in traditional parks where the superintendent has significant control over the resources within the park unit's boundaries—it requires a superintendent who is comfortable operating in a shared-power world (Bryson and Crosby, 1992). The ability to run a partnership park implies that there is enough goodwill to create partnerships; in cases where local sentiment is strongly opposed to the park unit, success will be more difficult. For a park that intends to follow the sort of example set by the MNRRA, it will be easier if there are already strong local, state or regional environmental regulations or land use controls in place for which an incentive program can be defined; otherwise the specter of excessive federal regulation is likely to frighten residents and local governments (Kyril, 1999).

A question remains as to whether the NPS actually wants these partnership parks or is the unwilling recipient of pork-barrel designations. Clearly, most of the units designated under the Clinton Administration through Congressional authorization fit the criteria for partnership park, as most of those are heritage areas, heritage corridors, and other similar designations.<sup>17</sup> The NPS has run symposia on partnerships (Zube, 1992), and it appears likely that at the upper management levels, NPS personnel see advantages to the partnership units—political (as well as ecological) benefits of designating new units without promising national-park levels of funding or engaging in the cost and trouble of land acquisition. Others, no doubt, see these units as weakening the traditional vision and goals of the park service. This is the sort of debate which has waxed and waned in its current form since the 1960s, when standards for parks were revised to include more urban and less traditional park forms.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Under consideration in the fall of 2000 is yet another unit likely to be a partnership park, Iowa's Loess Hills. There is virtually no federal land in the area undergoing a Special Resources Study, so some non-traditional status is practically necessary. In this particular case, the district-level personnel appear to support the idea of a partnership unit, after receiving clear direction from Secretary of the Interior Babbitt that designation of some sort of unit should be considered. See Iowa Loess Hills Special Resource Study, underway as of 8/31/00. Information in this footnote is based on author's attendance at the NPS' designations focus group meeting in summer, 2000, and conversations with NPS and other local persons regarding the designation.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance the debate surrounding the designation of the Mojave National Preserve documented in Hamin (2001a). More generally see histories of the NPS such as Foresta (1984), Hartzog (1988), Frome (1992), or Lowry (1994).

Over that period, however, we have witnessed an expansion in the types of areas considered appropriate for designation, so it appears to be an argument the traditionalists are losing.

Many rural communities are struggling to retain population and vitality, while others experience too-rapid and uncontrolled growth (Howe, McMahon et al., 1997). In either of these cases, exploring opportunities to work with the park service may be very beneficial. The reasons to want federal government participation in an area are fairly obvious. Association with the national park system can be an important tourism development tool, because it brings the sort of cachet and recognition necessary for building a tourism business sector. In rural areas with declining populations, that sort of economic development may mean the difference between people's ability to stay in an area and their need to move to urban areas. Being designated means there will be some federal money flowing into the area, although budgets for units vary significantly and NPS association is no guarantee of great government largesse. In areas experiencing rapid growth due largely to scenic and amenity values, a partnership park may provide the sort of leadership and protection that will be needed to retain the very amenity values that lured new residents and business there in the first place. For both situations, the NPS can provide leadership, facilitation, and technical expertise in helping communities achieve the sorts of protected but livable communities that they desire.

Partnership parks and protected landscapes are not the answer in all places, of course. In places of outstanding ecological importance, a purer and stronger form of protection based on federal ownership of land is appropriate. The resources of the NPS are already stretched thin, so how many new units they can manage is a topic of on-going debate. And local governments must have some willingness to share some power—anathema to many elected officials and government leaders. Still, as rural communities confront the reality of changing economies and demographics while the country seeks to assure protection of our ecological resources, the partnership parks model shows one way to balance the nation's good in land protection with the local good in control and use.

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