

National Park System Advisory Board 2013 Report

Task 5: Revisit the “Leopold Report”

Published in 1963, the *Leopold Report* (officially *Wildlife Management in the National Parks*) influenced the philosophy, policies, and people of the National Park Service. Now after 50 years, compelling reasons exist to revisit the *Leopold Report*. These include a much larger and more complex National Park System, a need to address cultural as well as natural resource management, a growing population and increased development near and around parks, the challenge of climate change, and extraordinary advances in science and ecosystem management.

Addressing the Task

The NPSAB Science Committee accepted the critically important task of revisiting the *Leopold Report* and communicating their findings to the NPS Director. The report focused on three questions: (1) What should be the goals of natural and cultural resource management in the National Park System? (2) What policies for resource management are necessary to achieve these goals? and (3) What actions are required to implement these policies?

Progress Report

The NPSAB Science Committee drafted *Revisiting Leopold: Resource Stewardship in the National Parks*, which the NPSAB approved unanimously. The report addressed a variety of critical issues, including the fact that changes confronting national parks are widespread, complex, accelerating, and volatile.

Revisiting Leopold offered numerous recommendations, including these key examples:

- The overarching goal of NPS resource management should be to “steward NPS resources for continuous change that is not yet fully understood in order to preserve ecological integrity and cultural and historical authenticity, provide visitors with transformative experiences, and form the core of a national conservation landscape and seascape.”
- The NPS must expand its scientific capacity, station more scientists in parks, and provide support for critical research needed to protect park resources.
- NPS management strategies must be expanded beyond park boundaries to larger landscapes and longer time horizons. Collaborative and efficient partnerships are essential to success.
- The NPS should integrate the precautionary principle into decision making at all levels. The principle emphasizes science-informed prudence and restraint, and requires the NPS to err on the side of preservation.
- Monitoring resource conditions is essential to managing for change, and NPS monitoring should be expanded and more integrated into educational outreach and research.

Priorities Through 2016

Revisiting Leopold emphasized urgency and opportunity in responding to the committee’s recommendations, and the importance of NPS resource management as an “enduring responsibility.” The report has been widely distributed. Dialogues are being held around the country to engage NPS employees, the scientific community, stakeholder groups, and citizens in considering the implications of the report as the NPS prepares to respond to the report’s recommendations.

Follow Our Work

View *Revisiting Leopold: Resource Stewardship in the National Parks* at www.nps.gov/calltoaction/PDF/LeopoldReport_2012.pdf. Learn more about the NPSAB Science Committee at www.nps.gov/resources/advisoryboardreport.htm.