

**National Park System Advisory Board**  
**SCIENCE COMMITTEE SUMMARY REPORT**  
**November 15, 2012**

**Background**

The “Leopold Report” (officially *Wildlife Management in the National Parks*) was published in 1963. Its influence upon the philosophy, policies, and persons of the National Park Service has been extraordinary. Now after 50 years, there are compelling reasons to revisit the Leopold Report. These include a much larger and more complex National Park System, 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 Science Committee of the National Park System Advisory accepted the critically important task to revisit the Leopold Report and report back their findings. The scope of the report includes both natural and cultural resource management focused on three questions: (1) What should be the goals of resource management in the National Park System? (2) What policies for resource management are necessary to achieve these goals? (3) What actions are required to implement these polices?

**Progress Report**

All members of the committee reviewed and commented on early report drafts. The committee and the NPS Advisory Board approved the final report unanimously. *Revisiting Leopold: Resource Stewardship in the National Parks* was delivered to the director on Founder’s Day, 25 August 2012.

The Report offered these key findings

Environmental changes confronting national parks are widespread, complex, accelerating, and volatile.

- Management based on historically successful practices cannot be assumed to be effective in the future.
- Increased scientific knowledge is essential to manage parks for change while confronting uncertainty, and to construct contemporary tactics for NPS park stewardship.
- Natural and cultural resource management must occur simultaneously and, in general, interdependently
- Iconic species and grand land- seascapes depend on difficult to observe but essential characteristics and processes of healthy ecosystems.
- Cultural resources extend beyond buildings and historic sites to include landscapes, indigenous values, diverse cultural knowledge, and the recent past.
- Park stewardship requires land- and seascape strategies and tactics at regional scales.

The Report made these key recommendations:

- 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: 1) preserve ecological integrity and cultural and historical authenticity, 2) provide visitors with transformative experiences, and 3) form the core of a national conservation land- and seascape.*”
- 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.
- The NPS should adopt a formal policy of decision-making based on best available sound science, accurate fidelity to the law, and long-term public interest.
- Current resource management policies should be revisited by the NPS and revised if necessary, to align with the overarching goal and maintain or increase current restrictions on actions that may impair resources.
- The NPS must expand its scientific capacity, station more scientists in parks, and provide support for critical research needed to protect park resources.
- Monitoring of resource conditions is essential to managing for change, and NPS monitoring should be expanded and more integrated into educational outreach and research.
- NPS professionals require training in communication, critical thinking, analysis, science, technology, and mathematics; superintendents require significant scientific literacy.
- The NPS should establish a standing Science Advisory Board representing diverse scientific and scholarly disciplines and advising the NPS Director on science issues and policy.

### **Realizing Our Vision**

*Revisiting Leopold* emphasized both urgency and opportunity in responding to the Committee’s recommendations, and the importance of NPS resource management as “an enduring responsibility. A series of 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**

**This section will include web links to a full report and other backup information.**

The report has been widely distributed and is available online at [www.nps.gov/calltoaction/PDF/LeopoldReport\\_2012.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/calltoaction/PDF/LeopoldReport_2012.pdf) .