

## OUTREACH EVENT REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Attendee's and Report Writer's Name:  
**Joseph Kerski**

Event:  
**George Wright Society (GWS) 2001 Biennial Meeting**

Location: Denver Marriott Hotel, Downtown Denver, Colorado.

Other USGS Attendees: Pat Schassburger (BRD), Steve Vandas (WRD), Diane Stephens (NMD), Ingrid Landgraf (NMD), and others, largely from BRD, including Denny Fenn, Associate Director for Biology.

Event Dates: 16-20 April 2001

### **Summary:**

The George Wright Society (GWS) is a nonprofit association of researchers, managers, administrators, educators, and other professionals who work on behalf of the scientific and heritage values of protected areas. Large natural protected areas (such as National Parks/Monuments) are often sites of important environmental research, natural resource management activities, inventory and monitoring projects, and so on. Protected cultural areas, such as historic sites and cultural landscapes, embody important and irreplaceable tangible and nontangible facets of history, archaeology, and other forms of heritage.

These are the functions the GWS supports by encouraging better research, resource management, and public education in protected areas.

The GWS was founded in 1980 to foster communication and bolster a sense of shared purpose. In my observations at the conference, 10% of the attendees were

USGS, 15% were from other federal agencies, 15% were from environmental organizations concerned with natural resources, and 60% were National Park Service (NPS) employees.



USGS Exhibit at George Wright Society.  
Pictured L-to-R: Joseph Kerski, Pat Schassburger, Steve Vandas.

The GWS pursues its goals by:

- (1) Publishing a quarterly journal, *The George Wright Forum*
- (2) Holding biennial conferences (every two years in rotating locations).
- (3) Producing a variety of publications on park research and management issues.
- (4) Providing references to Internet resources for professionals working in cultural and natural parks and protected areas. See [www.georgewright.org](http://www.georgewright.org) for more information.
- (5) Serving as a clearinghouse for inquiries.

### **Who Was George Wright?**

George Melendez Wright was born in 1904 and, long before wildlife conservation and management had become an institutionalized

part of park management, studied such issues in Yosemite National Park. In 1929 Wright initiated a wildlife survey program (which he himself funded) for the national parks. In 1930 he became the first chief of the wildlife division of the NPS, and under his leadership each park started to survey and evaluate the status of wildlife and to identify urgent problems. In 1932, he published "*Fauna of the National Parks of the US.*" He influenced nationwide planning for public parks and recreation areas and was named to a commission to work with Mexico in identifying and establishing new areas along the international boundary. He died in an auto accident in 1936 at the age of 32, on his way to becoming one of America's foremost conservationists.

Wright's contributions are distinguished by a keen perception of ecological problems: he recognized that, even then, protected areas were not biological islands that can stand aloof from the rest of the world. He also grasped the significance of long-term human influences on the North American landscape. He was one of the first protected area professionals to argue for a holistic approach to solving research and management problems.

I find it noteworthy that an organization adopted the name of a visionary; it helps keep the organization's vision at the forefront.

#### ***Observations and Recommendations:***

(1) By participating in this meeting, we demonstrated the leadership that the USGS has in:

1] Partnering with NPS and other environmental organizations to conduct interdisciplinary studies and generate data and tools for those studies.

***I would state emphatically that particularly because the NPS appears to be the only***

***federal agency concerned about the land to receive increases in funding in FY 01 and 02, it is in our best interest to partner with NPS at many levels.*** The USGS RMMC C&R group in Denver, for example, includes an NPS liaison, Ingrid Landgraf. Ms. Landgraf attended the entire conference and networked with the NPS staffers. Beyond the budgetary considerations, partnering with NPS will bring benefit to our own and other researchers studying human and natural impacts on parklands.

By working with NPS and GWS, the publicity generated for the USGS could potentially be enormous, particularly with increasing media attention on the environment, and continuing high publicity concerning national parks, monuments, and other protected areas. Political and sensitive issues surrounding the parks should only make us careful to work in this area, but it should not make us avoid it.

2] Existing data, research, and tools for interdisciplinary scientific studies on national parklands.

The USGS has a wealth of data sets, programs, and research efforts that this audience was interested in, particularly our research and data on wetlands, on abandoned mine lands, and on biodiversity.

(2) When many people think of parks, they think of them exclusively in terms of being vacation destinations and recreation areas. Yet every park also carries with it scientific and / or heritage values.

Over the last century, research and management in protected areas and on public lands has evolved into a unique profession. In no other is there such a diverse community of individuals, from such a wide spectrum of disciplines, working toward common goals. This reflects the rich variety of values expressed by cultural and natural parks, public forests and rangelands, wildlife

refuges, marine reserves, and other protected areas. For protected areas to be effective, historians must confer with natural resource managers, foresters with coastal biologists, archaeologists with interpreters, area managers and supervisors with data specialists--and all of these with the public.

The challenges facing protected areas today are so complex that they are larger than any single discipline. The interdisciplinary nature of USGS science and its interest in communication both match very well with the goals of the GWS.

Therefore, I believe that the George Wright Society conference is a worthwhile one for the USGS to participate in, particularly as we seek to concentrate efforts on targeted audiences and de-emphasize "general public" events where the benefit is questionable for the resources expended.

I highly recommend that we participate in this conference **every 2 years (i.e. at every meeting of the GWS)**. This event showed once again the excellent interdisciplinary work in planning and executing an event; in this case, particularly WRD, BRD, and NMD. I was particularly pleased to see Denny Fenn, Associate Director for Biology, attend this conference.

(3) I also recommend that the USGS form a MOU with the GWS to work on publications and joint projects. The GWS appears to be non-partisan and unbiased, concerned with information sharing and dissemination, just as the USGS is. This conference also opened the door to partner with other organizations, such as Earthwatch, on educational and other projects. I was surprised to have made so many contacts that will be useful for educational outreach in the future.

(4) ***As evidenced in the high quality publications from BRD that we displayed (see below), it is imperative that the USGS***

***publications group examine the feasibility of bringing all BRD publications into the main publications archive at the USGS in Denver.***

It is incredibly frustrating to us and to our customers that the BRD resources are difficult to obtain. This was mentioned at the Pubs 2000 conference in Denver in May 2000. What has become of this issue?

#### ***USGS Exhibit at the Conference:***

The USGS exhibit featured a flat panel display with the theme "Invasive Species" from HQ, and a table with the publications listed below. The publications were a combination of BRD information supplemented with USGS information from other disciplines, with an emphasis on research. There was another emphasis on spatial data resources, since many of the attendees were well-grounded in using GIS.

Our location at the entrance to the main exhibit area was well-positioned for receiving most of the conference attendees, particularly during the workshop breaks.

Several people took time to personally thank us for our data and exhibit at the conference. I was impressed at the quality of the BRD materials in particular, which I do not have the opportunity to use as often as other USGS publications. I brought a few of the Biodiversity booklets to my next meeting with the Biodiversity education team I am involved with, and it is already proving to be a valuable resource there. The "Status and Trends" CDs were also incredibly valuable.

Many people personally expressed concern over the USGS budget at the conference, particularly for NBII (which had a separate exhibit area in the main hall). Other USGS researchers were involved with information tables in the main hall.

It was noteworthy that the exhibits ran through Wednesday but the conference lasted through Friday. Exhibits are not the main focus of the GWS conference--networking and technical presentations are; nonetheless, the exhibit provided an excellent means of initiating contacts with people we seek to inform and develop partnerships with.

Publications:

FS- 20195, "Monitoring Environmental Effects" - 50

FS- 20495, "Biogeochemical Everglades, FL" - 50

FS- 22055, "Environmental Factors Used to" - 50

FS- 010-01, "USGS Science, Society, Solutions" - 200

67-0017, "Aerial Photographs and Satellite Images" - 50

96-0400, "USGS GeoData" - 50

FS- 037-00, "USGS World Wide Web Information" - 50

FS "Big Hole Project Montana" - 25

FS "Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem" - 50

FS- 018-00, "Fire Ecology in the Southeastern United States" - 50, if available

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Provided by BRD - Reston:

200 CD sets of Status and Trends of the Nations Biological Resources

42 Weed Fact Books

150 of Ecological Society of America's Invasive Species publication

150 Amphibian Decline Brochures

150 of Smithsonian's Biodiversity publication

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Provided by Heidi Koehler Koontz

Copies of GeoMac fact sheet

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Provided by Pat Schassburger

1. Copies of BRD fact sheets  
Copies of BRD Central Region Center fact sheet

Central Region fact sheet, "How to Get Information from the USGS"

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**Acknowledgements:**

I would like to thank Pat Schassburger, my outreach counterpart in BRD, for her leadership and for including me in this conference. I learned a great deal and it was a pleasure to work with Pat as well as Steve Vandas (WRD).

\*\*\* End of George Wright Society report \*\*\*