

FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT

CESU Agreement #: CA-1200-99-007

Title of Project: “Raiders of the National Parks”

Name of Park/NPS Unit: Arches National Park

Name of University Partner: Montana State University

NPS Key Official:

Mike Whatley, NRID Branch Manager
1201 Oakridge Drive
Fort Collins, CO 80525
970-491-3541
Mike_Whatley@nps.gov

Principal Investigator:

Ronald Tobias, Program Director
MFA in Science and Natural History Filmmaking
Montana State University
Bozeman, MT 59717
406-994-6227

Researcher:

Liz Smith
WorkinSync Productions
7391 Buffalo Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912
240-678-8326
workinsync@hotmail.com

NPS Account Number: 2360-2010-I2I

MSU Grant Number: Z3680

Date of Project Initiation: February 13, 2004

End Date of Project: March 30, 2005

List of Products: 27-minute digital video on the NPS Invasive Species Program, in color with sound, resulting in 1 master copy and 5 viewing copies.

Synopsis of the Project:

I began coordinating the production of “Raiders of the National Park” in February 2005. I immediately set up the granting paperwork between the NPS Natural Resources Information Division and Montana State University, including the creation of a budget and project outline for the film.

From February 13-March 8, 2004, I was involved in pre-production work, including the following:

- Scheduled 6 day film shoot in Arches National Park, March 9-15, 2004, including travel arrangements and film equipment reservations, rentals, and purchases.
- Researched invasive species, with emphasis on tamarisk and Arches National Park.
- Kept close contact with Chris Mayer, Mike Whatley, and Linda Drees of the National Park Service for planning, scheduling, and determining film outline.
- Kept contact with Ann Corson, Arches National Park Ranger Location Contact, for scheduling and planning.
- Developed basic shot sheet and necessary interviews.
- Developed interview questions.

During the week of March 9-15, 2004, I traveled to Arches National Park to attend the Exotic Plant Management Team meeting and gather information and footage for the film. Over the course of the week, I conducted on-camera interviews with EPMT personnel, park rangers, scientists, and meeting participants. I also gathered footage of the EPMT’s at work, the Tamarisk plant, visitors enjoying their visits, and scenics of Arches National Park.

Upon returning, I logged, captured and began editing the acquired footage. I created an outline of the plot structure and hired a writer to create a rough draft of the narration script. I continued to edit a rough cut together using the draft script as my framework. Over the course of the summer of 2004, reviews of the script were conducted with the NPS NRID team and external scientists. From these reviews, comments and edits were incorporated into the final version of the “Raiders of the National Park” script. In this timeframe, I also created storyboards for animations that showed the science and ecology behind the tamarisk plant. I hired a professional animator to create these visuals.

From August 19-22, 2004, I returned to Arches National Park to obtain footage of the tamarisk plant in bloom, the thriving washes of the park, and other needed images. Upon returning from this travel, I visited the NPS film archive at Harper’s Ferry, WV and obtained stock footage of other national parks for use in the film. I then incorporated the new footage and stock footage into the rough cut of the video.

In September 2004, I hired a professional voice talent to record the video’s narration. I then edited together a rough cut of the video with narration and submitted it to Ronald Tobias at MSU and Mike Whatley at NPS. Upon receiving comments, I rewrote portions of the narration script and edited the film down to 22 minutes. I also designed and created titles and credits for the film at this time.

During the Winter of 2004-05, I completed several re-edits of the film, coinciding with reviews from scientists, collaborators, other video professionals, and NPS personnel. In February 2005, I hired a contractor to create a soundtrack and complete the sound editing, re-mixing and sweetening for the film. During this time, I also authored the DVD which was to be the final format for the video. In March of 2005, the completed film was sent to the NPS Natural Resources Information Division. With their approval, the video was considered delivered for the purposes of the grant and my educational credits.

Considerations for Similar Projects:

Taking the final video product into consideration, I believe that this project and the collaboration between Montana State University was a successful one and worth future development. I believe that all involved parties were successful and gained something important from the project, not only in the form of the video itself, but also in terms of experience and learning.

On that note, I do believe there are several important improvements that can be made for future cooperative projects between Montana State University and the National Park Service, with regards to the creation of a video.

In particular, I believe that communication and scheduling need to be improved, more lead-time needs to be given, and students need to be more knowledgeable about the granting process.

Communications: While I believe that the *quality* of the communication between all parties was impressive and substantial, the *quantity* of communication was lacking. For a project of this scope, specifically in regards to its large amount of necessary revisions and reviews, I believe that weekly communications between the researcher/student, faculty advisor, and NPS representative would be highly advisable. I believe that closer communications with the National Park Service in regards to the script and rough cuts would have helped us avoid unnecessary work and time spent. I think this ill would be easily solved by more communication in general.

Scheduling: While the creation of a 22-minute video is a time consuming effort, I believe that this particular film could have been created in a shorter time span. One suggestion for improving this time span would be to create a stricter schedule for specific aspects of the film. At the beginning of the project, a more definitive schedule needs to be created, including all aspects of the process such as: acquisition of all necessary footage, rough cuts, script versions, fine cuts, soundtrack deadlines, as well as deadlines for comments and feedback from scientists, MSU advisors, and NPS personnel. I believe this particular film overshot its original intended deadline because a definitive schedule was not created or imposed.

Lead-time: One aspect that I believe the National Park Service could improve upon for future projects is lead-time on the events they wish to be included in a film. For this film, there was very little time to prepare and plan before the primary shooting had to be done in Arches National Park. Because of this initial rush and lack of time to properly prepare with research on the topic, I felt that several aspects of the filming were missed and had to be captured at a later date on the second Arches shoot. I believe that with more time and planning, the primary shoot for a film can be more effective and efficient.

Grant Process: One aspect that I believe Montana State University could improve upon for future projects is better training of its students to help them navigate the granting process. I believe that feeling more comfortable with and understanding the guidelines and regulations of the process would lead to a more effective and efficient filmmaking process.

Overall, I believe this project was a win-win situation and created a learning environment for all of the parties involved while also allowing for the creation of a very useful product. I'd like to thank those involved in the granting process for helping make the project happen successfully.

Liz Smith
May 25, 2005