2010 ROMO Resource Assessment Workshop: Preparing for Surprise and Opportunity

Executive Summary

A key to sustaining national parks and protected areas in today's era of accelerating change is to find ways to build resilience into management systems. This report describes one effort aimed at doing so: development and testing of an *adaptive framework* at Rocky Mountain National Park to help the park's Resource Stewardship employees create a more resilient management system that can anticipate and respond more quickly to changes of unanticipated type or scale. At a one-day facilitated workshop, park employees shared and built upon their various experiences and expertise to identify situations where unexpected events could have greatest impact on the health and welfare of the park. Included in this document are pre-workshop materials, a workshop summary, and products arising from it.

The workshop consisted of two sessions: First, permanent and term employees of the Resource Stewardship Division were asked to identify the highly valued resources within various park domains (e.g., alpine tundra; water resources), as well as the anthropogenic and physical processes most likely to influence those domains. Participants with different kinds of expertise then worked collaboratively to assess the likelihood that processes would affect each valued resource, as well as the level of current knowledge about what the interactions might entail. A second morning session was convened to evaluate the process, although that step may not be necessary in future iterations.

By identifying areas where knowledge about the best management response is lacking, the workshop process becomes a priority-setting tool for resource managers. It can generate strong employee buy-in because it draws on insights of key personnel to learn even more about a system they know well, and creates a new forum to merge management and scientific understanding on a day-to-day basis, engaging employees who ordinarily might have few opportunities to share insights. The resulting framework is not intended to be prescriptive, but offers a useful way to organize thoughts and identify priorities. Applying an adaptive framework can increase flexibility and opportunities for greater communication between scientists and park employees by incorporating feedback and interactions between biophysical and human systems.