



Best Practices and Attitudes for Interpreting Critical Resource Issues

Be respectful – remember the Visitor Bill of Rights – respectfully acknowledge someone’s right to hold a different perspective – you cannot force anyone to change their mind and should never attempt to do so

Visitor Bill of Rights

All park visitors have a right to:

- Have their privacy and independence respected
- Retain and express their own values
- Be treated with courtesy and consideration
- Receive accurate and balanced information
- Have a meaningful experience with park resources

Be provisional – acknowledge that this issue is dynamic, research is on-going, some aspects are uncertain – although the information we present is based on current prevailing scientific findings and projections, we don’t know all the answers

Be apolitical – parks belong to all citizens – and so do the critical issues that threaten park resources – stay away from political references or innuendos – do not get pulled into arguments or debates – remember that visitors often care about parks for different reasons – adopt an attitude, and set a tone, that assumes that everyone cares about preserving parks for future generations and therefore the issues that threaten park resources are not political issues

Be informed – develop deep KA (knowledge of the audience) and KR (knowledge of the resource) – understand the range of potential meanings for various audiences – keep abreast of the latest research, developments and changes

Be professional – even though critical resource interpretation has an agenda, it is an agency agenda with an agency perspective that supports the agency mission – be careful not to impose your personal perspectives and passions so that audience members can develop their own

Be strategic – help your park develop a comprehensive communication strategy for the critical issue -- tie the goals and objectives of your interpretive products to the site’s interpretive, management, and visitor experience goals – plan strategically to address the critical issue through a range of interpretive and information services to reach a broad audience – plan for formal and informal evaluation of communication strategies

Be interpretive – connect the critical resource issue to audience-relevant meanings – use a variety of appropriate interpretive techniques to appeal to different learning styles and audience interests – develop opportunities for both intellectual *and* emotional connections – use relevant and compelling themes and frames – interpret multiple perspectives

Be a facilitator – use a conversational style and develop the art and skill of facilitation, rather than a didactic lecture style – learn effective questioning strategies to engage the audience in discussion and dialog – learn techniques to diffuse tensions and differences and put the audience at ease -- interpret *with* park audiences rather than *for* them

Be site-specific – use the power of tangible, observable park resources as much as possible throughout the program – provide experiential opportunities that engage visitors with their surroundings, and especially resources and landscapes that are most at risk or threatened by the critical issue – know when to stop talking and let the resource speak for itself – make the resource the center of attention, rather than yourself

Be appropriate – engage in a level of interpretive influence and impact that is appropriate for your audience and for the type of program – don’t preach preservation – try to gauge audience interest and comfort level to know when it may be counter-productive to attempt to move toward stewardship advocacy – sometimes it’s enough to just raise awareness – in all cases, interpreters must “earn” the right to promote a call to action by first allowing visitors to make *their own* connections to resource meanings

Be positive – present a forward thinking, proactive outlook and tone – be honest about the seriousness of the issue but avoid “doom and gloom” characterizations – promote the notion that individual actions can make a huge difference – encourage the idea that national parks are set aside for *enjoyment* by current and future generations – they are places to experience beauty, wonder and humility, and to learn from the past in order to make the future a better place -- they are inherently places of hope