

Matching Agency Mission To Energy Goals: A Pathway To Success

*Stephen E. Butterworth
Regional Energy Manager
National Park Service*

ABSTRACT

By focusing on a National Park Service mission to preserve the resources entrusted to its stewardship, the agency messages on energy management have taken on a new meaning in today's environment. More employees might be listening.

BACKGROUND

The author currently serves as the regional energy manager for 58 national parks stretching from Montana to Guam. With over 3,500 employees, these national parks consumed nearly 31,000 MWhrs of grid-supplied electricity, with even more power generated by diesel generator, micro-hydro, and a growing number of photovoltaic systems. And that's just the energy needed to power government functions. It does not account for power needs to run hotels, lodges, restaurants, stores, dormitories, and residencies. With over 6.5 Msf in buildings, some parks operate as small communities, with schools, medical clinics, jails, and complete electric, water, sewer, and street utilities. Until now, there has not been an energy message that fully captured the attention of the workforce.

It has been true that actions can inspire. When photovoltaic systems are installed in one park, or in one part of a large park, other employees see the benefits and start planning to acquire their own renewable energy system.

CHALLENGE

For over 25 years, the regional energy program has attempted to promote the latest energy conservation goals enacted by a new executive order or public law. Managing such a large region is challenged by differing time zones, climate zones, political subdivisions, utilities, and a diverse workforce. The author has tried a number of approaches and media to get the message across. Face-to-face arm twisting has been limited by travel restrictions, so the face may appear in front of a large group or be projected via video conferencing. The distribution of printed material has been reduced by the increased cost of printing and mailing, so electronic versions of the message now get out via email and web posting. Institutional media may be less effective than social media.

DISCUSSION

Hardly any government activity within a park, or visitor enjoyment of the park experience, happens without the consumption of power, fuel, or water. With a nearly limitless opportunity to improve energy efficiency, convert to alternative fuels, build renewable energy systems, conserve water, and reduce the resultant carbon footprint, where do you start?

The Organizational Approach

This often involves assigning the role of energy manager to a specific person, but in a small organization this is usually a collateral duty. While seemingly efficient in nature, over time, the major duties of the job prevail and the energy management function slides into an “as needed” arrangement. On rare occasions, a designated person evolves into an energy champion and the energy program thrives. Most of the time, the annual energy report becomes the only mandatory accomplishment.

The Budget Approach

This involves having the group that pays the energy bills be responsible for energy management. But if the organization makes the process of payment a routine event, meaning that a clerk receives the bill, pays the bill, and files the resultant paper documentation, then the importance of the energy data is restricted to just that month and cannot support a long-term energy management effort.

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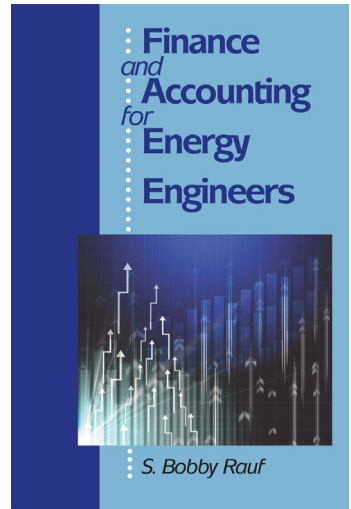
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The Shotgun Approach

This involves posters, signs, and special initiatives like “October is Energy Awareness Month” that strive to get the message out to the greatest number of people possible. Unless it is followed by managerial action such as an award recognition program, new energy projects, or changes in how work is performed, it becomes a one-way messaging process that rarely becomes a collaborative effort between managers and staff.

The Mission Approach

Not to be confused with the messaging efforts of the shotgun approach, this focuses on why the employee chose to work for the organization.

When people hear “National Park Service,” they tend to visualize a national park. For many who want to work for the National Park Service, it reflects a dream to live and work in a national park. For others, it is an opportunity to pursue a career of protecting America’s wonders or telling the story of America through a park setting.

Scientists are documenting biotic changes happening in our national parks, such as species changing location or the timing of certain predictable events. From mainstream media to professional journals, the story is being repeated. One such story you might have already heard is that by 2030 all of the glaciers in Glacier National Park may no longer exist.

Since the operation of parks can be portrayed as a carbon footprint, we now have a “connect the dots” approach to relate energy consumption to a threat to park resources. In other words, in going about our business, are we threatening the resources that we have a *mission* to protect. Even more to the point, does the individual employee now understand how decisions made during the course of a day’s work could possibly be impacting the very reason for that day’s work?

So, by rephrasing the point about glaciers into the question, “What should be the new name of Glacier National Park after the last glacier is gone?” we are now speaking to the challenge of meeting the mission of the park service, which is:

The service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of the federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations hereinafter specified, . . . as provided by law, by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments, and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein

and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in enjoyment of future generations.

Today's available energy management technologies to conserve resources and energy, generate renewable energy, and convert to more friendly energy alternatives are the best approaches to alter how park operations may be contributing to the threat of park resources. And when employees realize how their day-to-day choices in using energy may impact the resources which their job is to protect, the message comes home. More and more, employees are getting involved in choosing sustainable work practices because they believe they are mission focused.

PARKS BELONG TO ALL OF US

The recent PBS series on the national parks has spread the word. Americans' awareness about their parks is on an upswing. The benefit of sustainable energy practices and how they help protect the parks might just be transferrable from park employees to park neighbors, to park visitors, and indeed to all who live in America.

The question lives on, "What will you call Redwoods National Park when there are no more redwood trees?" ... "What will you call Everglades National Park when the everglades are gone?" ... The question can be applied again and again. Waiting for the final outcome to determine whether the question was appropriate or not carries the threat of too large a loss to risk. The passenger pigeon is gone—forever.

If we are looking for new approaches to solving our country's energy challenges, then a park can be adopted. A corporation can adopt a park, not to just pick up litter along the roadside, but to help protect the park's resources through enlightened energy practices. The same can be said of communities, associations, and individuals.

The national parks were thought to be forever. Through wise energy management, they stand a better chance.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mr. Butterworth has a 41-year career with the National Park Service. He was a founding member of the Federal Network for Sustainability and received a team White House Closing the Circle Award for its accomplish-

ments. He has twice been awarded the Department of Energy's Federal Energy Management Award and has been recognized by the Environmental Protection Agency. He assisted in developing the Energy Smart Parks Program and the first handbook developed specifically for national park lighting retrofit projects. His current assignment is regional energy manager for the Pacific West Region, which has the largest network of renewable energy systems in the National Park Service. Noted for his ability to "think outside the box," build partnerships, promote opportunities, and secure continuing support to support the mission of the National Park Service through better energy management and sustainable practices, he continues to empower employees, thus assuring new leaders for the future.

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