

MODULE 1  
**INTRODUCTION**



*Through interpretive and educational programs, the public gains appreciation and insight into California's natural and cultural riches. Through leadership and example, the Department will mentor practices to sustain these riches into the future.*



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MODULE 1

# INTRODUCTION

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## INTERPRETATION: WHAT IS IT?

Each year, 70 to 80 million people visit California's state parks. (That's more than Southern California's Disneyland, Sea World, and Universal Studios, combined.) Visitors travel to these precious places seeking various recreational experiences. Interpretation is used in many forms by park staff and volunteers to communicate with these visitors. Used correctly, interpretation functions as the preferred management tool to help increase the visitors' enjoyment and protect the park resources.

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In this module we'll focus on the definition of interpretation. Interpretation is driven by a philosophy that charges interpreters to help audiences care **about** park resources so they might support the care **for** park resources. Interpretation establishes the value of preserving park resources by helping audiences discover the meanings and significance associated with those resources. (Foundations of Interpretation, National Park Service, 2007). This philosophy will be further explored in *Module 2—Purpose and Value*.

*In the end, we will  
conserve only what we  
love. We will love only  
what we understand.  
We will understand only  
what we are taught.*

Baba Dioum

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Although there are many definitions of interpretation, they all center on the idea of translating information from the scientist, the historian, and the manager to the visitor. Over time, how interpretation has been defined and delivered has changed and evolved. *Module 1—Introduction* summarizes the historical development of interpretation, presents some of the currently accepted definitions of interpretation, and reviews the interpretive services provided by California State Parks. *Module 1—Introduction* answers the question, "**Interpretation: What is it?**"

## 1.1 HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

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When reviewing the history of the profession of interpretation, certain names such as Enos Mills, John Muir, and Freeman Tilden consistently appear. The State of California has also played a key role in the development of the discipline. Interpretation began as a private business and was soon adopted by public agencies and organizations. As the country and its people changed and evolved, so has the discipline of interpretation.

### THE PEOPLE

#### Enos Mills (1870-1922)



Enos Mills is considered one of the founders of the interpretive profession. He started interpreting as a “nature guide” in 1889, leading trips to Long’s Peak, in what later became Rocky Mountain National Park.

Mills had an insatiable thirst for knowledge about the Rockies and believed a nature guide must “have a wide range of knowledge and to be capable of tactfully imparting this directly and indirectly” (Mills, 1920, p. 110). During the span of his career, Mills led over 250 groups to the summit of Long’s Peak, encouraging their connection to the resources he loved so dearly. Mills was one of the first to identify the relationship between what visitors learn about a resource and how much they care for it, and want to protect it.

He influenced the evolution of park protection, started one of the first programs in the country to train interpreters, and authored more than 15 books about the art and science of interpreting. His book, *Adventures of a Nature Guide*, written in 1920, paints a wonderful historical picture of interpretation early in its professional development. “This new occupation is likely to be far-reaching in its influences; it is inspirational and educational. Anyone who has a vacation or an outing in contact with nature will have from the great outdoors its higher values as well as a livelier enjoyment if accompanied by a nature guide” (Mills, 1920, p. 154). Mills’ thoughts and observations regarding the profession form the foundation of today’s interpretive theory and practice.

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*I developed nature  
guiding, that is, helping  
people to become happily  
acquainted with the life  
and wonders of wild nature.*

Enos Mills

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## John Muir (1838-1914)



Although John Muir's role in the development of interpretation is less obvious than Enos Mills' is, it is no less important. John Muir has been credited with being the first to use the term "interpret" in reference to nature.

Muir's work embodied the essence of interpretation. He used his communications of the natural world to encourage people to protect and preserve the topics of his stories. Muir was seminal in the establishment of Yosemite as a national park and was the founder of the Sierra Club. Through his writings and presentations, Muir interpreted much of the West to the nation.

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*I'll interpret the rocks, learn the language of the flood, storm and avalanche. I'll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can.*

John Muir

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## Freeman Tilden (1883-1980)



Freeman Tilden's influence and impact on the field of interpretation is one of the most strongly felt today. Many consider him to be the "father" of modern interpretation. Unlike Mills and Muir, he was not a naturalist nor an interpreter, but a writer and a reporter. He was hired by the National Park Service to tour the parks, observe all he could, and write about the interpretive services provided. His book, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, written in 1957, is one of the most widely accepted reviews of the philosophy of interpretation. Tilden wrote many other books and continued his work for over 20 years. No modern literary work has had the same impact on the field of interpretation as *Interpreting Our Heritage*.

## TILDEN'S SIX PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

- Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
- Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based on information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
- Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
- The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
- Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
- Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of 12) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.

### Galen Clark (1814-1910)



Galen Clark is often overlooked but is one of the most important people in California's history of interpretation. A law signed by Abraham Lincoln in 1864 created the first state park in the country in Yosemite Valley. In 1866, more than 20 years before Mills led his first trip up Long's Peak, Galen Clark became the first formally appointed, paid park ranger in the country (Lynch, 1996). Called the "Guardian of Yosemite," Clark became both protector and educator.

Clark's primary directive, from the eight-member Commission appointed to manage the park, was to protect the park. Over the years, Clark led hundreds of visitors, including John Muir, through the wilds of Yosemite. After several excursions with Clark, Muir said, "His kindness to all Yosemite visitors and mountaineers was marvelously constant and uniform" (Muir, 1912, p. 189). In fact, Clark "began the proud tradition of protection and care of parks, combined with helpful service to the visiting public" (Lynch, 1996, p. 13). In 1880, when Clark was no longer the official "Guardian" of Yosemite, he continued to lead groups through the valley operating what he termed a "Tourist Coach." Clark was arguably then both the first officially appointed, paid interpreter and the first one practicing the profession as a private citizen.

## FEDERAL AGENCIES

Traditionally born out of the National Park Service, interpretation, in one form or another, is used by all resource-management agencies today. Although it is used in a number of capacities, the primary function of interpretation has always been as a management tool.

### National Park Service (NPS)

California not only had the first paid “interpreter” in any state, it was also home to the first paid interpreter for the National Park Service. In 1920, more than 40 years after Clark served as the first paid “Guardian of Yosemite,” the NPS hired its first interpreters for Yosemite.



In 1919, Stephen Mather, the first director of the newly established NPS, was traveling in the Tahoe area when he saw a captivated crowd gathered around Loye Miller at Fallen Leaf Lodge. Miller was a paleo-ornithologist and educated audiences with his entertaining presentations about birds. Mather, charged with protecting the national parks, recognized that this was exactly what he was seeking “in order to counteract those persons who would selfishly destroy park values” (Sharpe, 1976, p. 31). After several months, he succeeded in convincing those involved at Tahoe to come to Yosemite. Mather was so sure that nature guiding was essential to the successful management of the parks that he personally financed the early work in Yosemite for several years. The NPS continues to be the leader in providing interpretive services.

### United States Forest Service (USFS)

The United States Forest Service manages some of the largest areas of public land in the United States—155 national forests and over 100 National Scenic Byways across the country. The agency began to develop its own version of interpretive services when it created the Branch of Visitor Information Services in 1961. One of the primary reasons for its establishment was to help explain to the public the complex policies set forth in the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960. The USFS was shifting its focus for the management of the public’s resources. It was clear that the public needed to be educated about the changes.



Since formally offering the first interpretive services in 1961, USFS has had a tumultuous history of providing interpretation to the public. In 1980, USFS changed the name of its interpretive program from Visitor Information Services to Interpretive Services—the focus being to orient, inform, and interpret to visitors.

USFS is currently in the process of developing an Interpretive Services Strategy. One of the primary issues with interpretation for USFS is that employees are asked to perform many duties. Those conducting interpretation are only focusing about 20-50% of their time on interpretation (Prell, 2002). Most of the interpretation conducted by this federal agency is done in writing, through signs and brochures, and reaches millions of visitors annually. For the Pacific Southwest Region of the USFS, Sharon Prell, Recreation Extension Agent, said that they “strive to meet the growing demands of people who seek learning-based activities and want more than just information” (Prell, 2002).

### United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service also began to provide interpretive services in response to management concerns. Early in its inception, the primary visiting public was composed of hunters and fishermen who, through the purchase of licenses and equipment, provided much of the funding for the agency. The 1980s saw a decline in the numbers of people fishing and hunting regularly and an increase in a new population of users. These “non-consumptive” users were not interested in shooting the wildlife with a gun, but with a camera. Terms such as “watchable wildlife” surfaced and new management issues occurred. In fact, one of the most popular recreation activities today is bird watching, and “birders” flock to lands managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Through employees and contractors, the USFWS provides interpretive services to millions of visitors across the country.



### Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

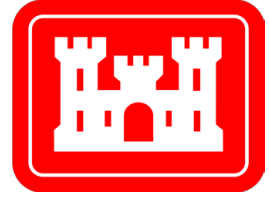
The Bureau of Land Management, much like the USFWS, has a relatively young history in interpretation. With the largest public land base in the country, the BLM has great potential for increasing its interpretive efforts. BLM lands offer opportunities for energy development, mining, grazing, and a host of other uses. Like the USFS, the BLM began offering interpretive services in response to a legislated change in management mandate. In 1976, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act was passed, requiring that the BLM manage its land for multiple uses, including recreation. Increased use combined with fragile arid environments forced the agency to provide more interpretive services in an effort to protect resources and provide for the mandated multiple uses. Today, several BLM sites around the country, such as Coos Bay in Oregon and the Lost Coast in California, are increasing interpretive services offered to the public.





## United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

The United States Army Corps of Engineers provides the greatest number of water-based recreation opportunities in the country. Although the agency began in 1936, it did not start providing recreation services until the mid-1940s. In the early 1980s, the USACE began to establish a Visitor Perception and Interpretive Services Program. The goal of the program is to educate and enlighten the public regarding the purpose and concept of the USACE, the operation of their water projects, and the historical and natural features of the area. In addition to providing many of the same interpretive services as the other federal agencies, the USACE also provides many unique opportunities in interpretation—such as self-guided water trails and interpreter-led boat tours. Although today there are many water-based interpretive opportunities provided by other organizations and agencies, the USACE was one of the first to provide such services for the public. The USACE has also conducted and funded research to demonstrate the effectiveness of interpretation in meeting agency goals and objectives.



## STATE AGENCIES

### California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR)

### California State Parks (CSP)



In 1927, a comprehensive plan was signed into law creating California's state park system. With help from the Save the Redwoods League and individuals such as Frederick Law Olmstead, Newton B. Drury, and John D. Rockefeller, the state park system grew rapidly. Newton Drury oversaw the evolution of the organization as Chief of California's Division of Beaches and Parks. Throughout the history of the organization, there have been several different divisions, including the Division of Beaches and Parks, the Division of Recreation, and the Division of Small Craft Harbors. In 1961, these various divisions merged into the Division of Beaches and Parks. In 1967, William Penn Mott, Jr. became the director and transformed the Division of Beaches and Parks into the current California State Parks. Mott was one of the most influential leaders in California State Parks and one of the most ardent supporters of the role of interpretation in the parks.

*The Mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration, and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.*

The California Department of Parks and Recreation, commonly known as California State Parks (CSP), manages parks that encompass over one third of California's coastline. More than 2,500 state park employees and 15,000 volunteers help maintain and protect some of California's most pristine, scenic and fragile areas as well as valuable cultural resources. California's state parks are not only visited by the public, but are valued by them as well. In 2000, California voters passed the largest state park bond (\$2.1 billion) in the nation's history. In 2002 voters approved a second, even larger, park bond (\$2.6 billion). Within CSP, interpretation plays a large role. In the 2003-4 fiscal year, 3.15 million visitors participated in guided walks, talks, tours and demonstrations. In addition, more than over one-half million children attended our formal interpretive programs that year.

## Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW)

Department of Fish and Wildlife is another state agency that provides interpretive and educational services for the public. The agency was an early player in interpretation by sponsoring lectures and tours throughout the state. DFW is charged with managing California's fish, wildlife, and plant resources and the habitats on which they depend. According to the mission of the agency, these resources should be protected for their "ecological values and for their use and enjoyment by the public."

Beginning in the 1850s, DFW enacted laws to protect and manage the state's wildlife. In 1914, DFW created the Bureau of Education, Publicity and Research because of the clear need to develop these areas. In 1984, DFW's Conservation Education implemented Project Wild, and later added Aquatic Wild. These popular programs provide free wildlife education throughout the state. Other popular outreach efforts, spearheaded by DFW interpreters, include the Hunter Education and the Urban Fishing Programs.



## Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)

CAL FIRE has been in existence since 1905, although it has changed significantly through the years. This agency exists to serve and safeguard the people and protect the property and resources of California. Interpretive efforts are geared mainly towards fire prevention and preparation for natural catastrophes like wildfire and floods.



CAL FIRE's Safety Education programs are spread statewide and come in the form of school group programs, fair exhibits, posters, flyers and thousands of other printed materials, radio and television spots, community meetings, one-on-one contacts and websites. In addition to fire safety and prevention, CAL FIRE works to help the public better understand resource conservation and forestry. CAL FIRE operates eight Demonstration State Forests.

## Department of Water Resources (DWR)

The Department of Water Resources is a fourth state agency that provides interpretive services in California. DWR was created in 1956 by the California State Legislature to plan and guide the development of the state's water resources. With increasing demands on water resources and public conflict over the use of those resources, DWR created the Office of Public Information and Communications in 1987. Now known as the Office of Water Education, its primary function is to conduct outreach and education for the public regarding the state's water resources. School publications, public tours, and exhibits are the most common outreach tools used by the DWR. Many state recreation areas are operated in cooperation with the DWR.



## **LOCAL AGENCIES**

Many communities, cities, special districts, and counties have museums, parks, cultural sites, recreational facilities, and zoos. They are managed by local government agencies and nonprofit organizations. Each varies greatly in their approach to interpretation. Some, like the East Bay Regional Park District and the Oakland Museums of California, are well established and have developed extensive facilities and programs, reaching thousands of visitors each year. These organizations have the ability to adapt and transform themselves, expanding their outreach to the perceived needs of their respective communities. They have adopted a regional or statewide approach to interpretation and offer comprehensive training for their staff and volunteers, as well as for individuals from other agencies. Other organizations have taken more modest approaches, but in most cities and counties there is at least one organization that is focused on the preservation and interpretation of the area's natural or cultural history.

## **PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS**

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that provide interpretive services and opportunities can be classified into two groups, for-profit and nonprofit.

## **FOR-PROFIT**

For-profit organizations are similar to those that gave rise to the profession of interpretation. For example, the early work of Enos Mills and Loye Miller was conducted for a fee. Today, this for-profit work has transformed from a few individuals conducting programs for a minimal fee and maybe food and lodging, to a multimillion-dollar-a-year business.

Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing areas in recreation (Doyle, 1999) and interpreters are especially in demand. The Ecotourism model leads to conservation of exotic, pristine, or threatened resources by involving local communities in sustainable activities—including promoting and providing opportunities for responsible tourism.

Interpretation is also done for profit by tour companies, cruise lines, and travel organizations. These groups hire interpreters to help visitors have meaningful and enjoyable experiences with the resources they are visiting, thus ensuring customer satisfaction and return business. Many interpreters also make their livings providing contractual services and training for outfitters and guides.

## NONPROFIT

There are thousands of nonprofit organizations throughout the country that provide interpretive services to the public. Organizations such as the California State Parks Foundation, National Audubon Society, the Nature Conservancy, and the National Parks and Conservation Association are a few of the better known nonprofit organizations.

In California State Parks, there are more than 85 nonprofit cooperating associations that assist with fundraising to support interpretive efforts. Some of the most visible services provided by cooperating associations in California State Parks are the sales and services provided in visitor centers and bookstores. Cooperating associations began in California in 1972, and they collectively contribute more than 10 million dollars per year to fund critical staff positions, exhibits, visitor center developments, junior ranger and nature walk programs, living history demonstrations, special events and many other exciting projects.

The typical California State Parks cooperating organization usually consists of a Board of Directors, volunteers, and, in some associations, paid staff. A state park employee serves as Cooperating Association Liaison (CAL), the conduit between the Board of Directors and California State Parks.

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*Nature is not so much her own ever-sweet interpreter, as the mere supplier of that cunning alphabet, whereby selecting and combining as he pleases, each man reads his own peculiar lesson according to his own peculiar mind and mood.*

Herman Melville

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## SIGNIFICANT DATES IN INTERPRETIVE HISTORY

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- 1864** Yosemite Valley declared first state park in the nation
- 1866** Galen Clark appointed “Guardian” of Yosemite
- 1872** First national park established—Yellowstone
- 1889** Enos Mills began leading trips as a “nature guide”
- 1891** Forest Reserve Act created National Forest System
- 1897** Forest Management Act establishes reserves
- 1914** California Department of Fish and Game—Bureau of Education, Publications and Resources established
- 1916** National Park Service Act passed
- 1918** Save the Redwoods League established
- 1920** Steven T. Mather hired as first paid “interpreter” in the national parks
- 1927** California State Park System created
- 1938** First National Park Service Jr. Naturalist Programs, Yosemite
- 1956** California Dept. of Water Resources established
- 1957** Freeman Tilden published *Interpreting Our Heritage*
- 1960** Multiple Use-Sustained Yield act passed
- 1961** US Forest Service—Visitor Information Services branch established
- 1964** Wilderness Act passed
- 1967** William Penn Mott, Jr. became director of California State Parks
- 1972** First California State Parks cooperating associations established
- 1973** California State Parks—Junior Ranger Program established statewide.  
The Center for Continuous Learning welcomed Ranger Trainee Group J and K as the first groups to attend training in the Department’s new training center at Asilomar
- 1974** The Center for Continuous Learning renamed the William Penn Mott, Jr. Training Center
- 1976** Federal Land Policy and Management Act established
- 1980** U.S. Army Corps of Engineers established Visitor Perception and Interpretive Services Program
- 1984** California Dept. of Fish and Game—Project Wild and Aquatic Wild established
- 1987** California DWR Office of Public Information and Communication established
- 1988** National Association for Interpretation established
- 1995** NPS establishes professional standards for its agency’s interpreters.
- 2005** Education and the Environment curriculum legislation for California’s K-12 students.

## **1.2 INTERPRETATION DEFINED**

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There are many definitions of interpretation. In fact, Tilden said good interpreters will come up with their own definitions. Tell anyone outside of the discipline that you are an interpreter and they will ask what language you speak. In a way, they are right in their understanding of the word. To interpret is to translate the language of the scientist, the voices of the past, and the significance of the places to create meanings and connections with the people of the present. Interpreters connect people with their cultural and natural heritage in order to promote stewardship of resources. They communicate the science of the natural world, the stories of the cultural world, and the excitement of the recreational world to an audience in a manner that is provoking and interesting, and leaves the audience wanting to discover more.

Interpretation is an artful form of communication that stresses ideas and relationships, not simply isolated facts and figures. This is best achieved through the use of hands-on approaches, firsthand experiences, or the use of physical objects.

The National Association for Interpretation (NAI) is an international organization that promotes leadership and excellence in the interpretive profession. NAI defines interpretation as “a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource.” Here are some other popular definitions.





## 1.3 TYPES OF INTERPRETATION

There are two basic types of interpretive services provided in California's state parks, personal and nonpersonal. Personal interpretation involves some type of physical interaction with the visitor, such as leading visitors through the park. Nonpersonal interpretive services, such as brochures, exhibits and websites, are used by visitors without the presence of staff.

A primary characteristic that distinguishes nonpersonal services from personal services is that nonpersonal interpretation is nonlinear. In other words, the visitor controls the order of information received. For example, when visitors pick up a brochure, they can read whatever parts may interest them. Personal interpretive services, on the other hand, are linear with the interpreter controlling the order of information. There are positive and negative aspects to each approach. The following section briefly describes each approach and the accompanying qualities and characteristics associated with its use.

### NONPERSONAL

Nonpersonal interpretation typically includes any written, audio, or visual messages provided for visitors without the use of direct personal contact with visitors. They may be designed to orient visitors, provide information or educate. Nonpersonal interpretation may be delivered in a variety of ways (see Table 1.1).



*Interpretive panels are nonpersonal services.*

Table 1.1

## COMMON NONPERSONAL INTERPRETIVE SERVICES

- **Brochures/pamphlets/maps**—Publications that convey information, orientation, or educational messages. These are the most common form of nonpersonal services used in California State Parks.
- **Signs**—Free-standing, affixed messages provided at specific locations. Signs are usually two-dimensional, include graphics, may be interactive, and are made of numerous material types.
- **Exhibits**—Three-dimensional, object, or artifact-based displays. Exhibits are often interactive and can include written, visual, kinesthetic, and auditory methods of communication.
- **Wayside exhibits**—The term used to describe a sign or exhibit that is located along a road or trail.
- **Self-guided trails**—A trail that is interpreted through the use of brochures, signs, podcasts, cell phone tours and/or media. An interpretive self-guided trail may be established along a trail, road, underwater, or even in the sky.
- **Newspapers**—Park information on newsprint, usually created annually or seasonally for the park or the region. These often includes the park rules, regulations, and general information.
- **Websites**—The park's presence on the web is often the first place visitors look for information. Sites may present maps, guides, podcasts, school group information, trip planning, virtual tours and exhibits, written guides/brochures, seasonal updates and rules and regulations. Visitors download sections at will and follow links to related sites.
- **Audiovisual**—Videos are usually used as the introduction/welcome to the park and shown in visitor or information centers. They may be available as souvenirs and promotional tools to increase visitor use.
- **Computer Kiosk**—Interactive method for visitors to receive specific information. Often found in visitor centers and have touch screen, keypad, mouse and monitors.
- **Radio transmissions**—Low-frequency radio transmissions that reach visitors' vehicular radios. Roadside signs tell visitors how to tune in.

Nonpersonal interpretation offers many advantages. It is often less expensive than personal contact. It allows one skilled interpreter to reach countless numbers of visitors in an indirect way. It gives visitors freedom to choose what is of most interest to them and to choose the time that suits them for their interpretive experiences. It can be presented in a variety of languages and formats.

The nonlinear nature of nonpersonal communication may result in several negative characteristics. Because visitors can pick and choose what they select, they may not be receiving the primary message intended by management. In addition, there is no way of knowing what messages, if any, are received.

Another disadvantage is that the creation of quality, nonpersonal interpretive services may require expertise and equipment not readily available at individual park units. A great deal of thought and planning should go into the creation, placement, and selection of nonpersonal interpretive services. Due to the high front-end cost, nonpersonal interpretive services like wayside panels may be used for years. Too many or inappropriately placed nonpersonal interpretive services can result in a very negative image for the agency. For example, several signs along a scenic trail overlooking the ocean may only serve to distract from the natural beauty of the surroundings. Care and attention should be used to ensure that nonpersonal interpretation is not inaccurate, out-of-date, vandalized, or damaged.

## PERSONAL

Personal interpretive services involve direct, face-to-face contact with the visitor. Personal services include walks, talks, tours, demonstrations, children's programs, roving, campfire programs, and even providing information at the front desk. As discussed above, the primary characteristic—aside from contact with an individual that distinguishes personal services from nonpersonal—is that personal interpretation is given in a linear fashion. The interpreter generally controls the order of the information presented to the public.

There are many benefits to providing personal interpretive services; the primary one is that the interpreter has more control over which message the visitor walks away remembering. In addition, interpreters have the opportunity to interact with visitors and answer questions or clear up any misunderstandings. Many visitors like



knowing that a real person is available. In this day and age of computers, voicemail and automated services everywhere, personal experiences with people can be very rewarding and satisfying. Personal contact with visitors also helps park managers become aware of visitors problems and concerns before the issues become critical.

The term “authenticity” has also been used to distinguish personal from nonpersonal services (Knudson, Cable, and Beck, 1995). An interpreter can physically engage visitors in a way that creates an authentic experience with the park resources. Personal interpretation is a powerful approach because the interpreter can continually adapt to each audience. Skilled interpreters will listen and learn about the members of their audiences and tailor each program to their needs and interests.

There are negative aspects to providing personal services. First and foremost is the high cost per person contacted for interpreter-led programs. On average, most estimates conclude that only 20 percent of visitors attend interpreter-led programs (Knudson, Cable, and Beck 1995). In addition, each interpreter can only be in one place at a time thus reducing both the overall visibility and the number of visitors contacted throughout the resource. Interpreter-led programs may also reduce visitors’ feelings of freedom and discovery. As with nonpersonal services, poor training, preparation, and presentation can leave a negative impression on visitors.

**Given the importance of every contact, providing quality interpretation helps fulfill the mission of California State Parks.** This handbook will review the theories, techniques, and skills necessary for providing effective personal interpretation.

## WHAT’S AHEAD?

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As we have seen, there are many types of interpretation, each with its own characteristics. The following modules will explain how to conduct several types of interpretive programs. However, before we can answer the question, “**How do we do it?**” we should ask ourselves, “**Why do we do it?**” Now that we have an understanding of what interpretation is, we can turn to *Module 2—Purpose and Values*—to discover why we should conduct interpretation in California’s state parks.

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Module 1

## INTRODUCTION

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### SELF ASSESSMENT

Answer each question in the section below before reviewing the material in *Module 1—Introduction*. The answers are not provided. Compare your answers with your colleagues and as you read *Module 1—Introduction*. Items from the self assessment may be reviewed and discussed in class.

- 1) Historically, what was the primary function of interpretive services?

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- 2) Who was the first official paid park ranger in the country?

- a) Galen Clark
- b) Enos Mills
- c) Freeman Tilden
- d) John Muir

- 3) California State Parks was created in which year?

- a) 1957
- b) 1919
- c) 1916
- d) 1927

- 4) Which federal agency provides the most interpretive services for the public?
- a) United States Forest Service
  - b) National Park Service
  - c) U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
  - d) Bureau of Land Management
  - e) U. S. Army Corps of Engineers

- 5) In your own words, what is the mission of California State Parks? How does interpretation help fulfill this mission?

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- 6) Name two state agencies, other than California State Parks, that provide interpretive services in California.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

- 7) What is interpretation?

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8) Name three forms of nonpersonal interpretive services provided in California State Parks.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

9) Name three benefits of providing personal interpretive services as opposed to nonpersonal services.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Now that you have completed the self assessment questions, review the material in *Module 1—Introduction* to confirm your answers. After reading the module, move on to the workbook learning activities, which will assist you in developing your skills.

## WORKBOOK LEARNING ACTIVITIES

To help you review and apply the material covered in *Module 1—Introduction*, a selection of review questions and/or activities is provided. Again, no answers are included. Use the material from the module, outside sources, and your colleagues to help you complete the activities and answer the questions. There may be more than one right answer. Use the questions and activities to generate discussion about the material. Be prepared to discuss, perform, or demonstrate your answers in class.

- 1) If interpretation started as a management tool, what do you think is the function of interpretation in California State Parks today?

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- 2) Are personal or nonpersonal interpretive services more effective? Why?

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- 3) What is the difference between interpretation and information? Explain.

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- 2) Write a brief summary or list of the types of interpretive services currently provided in your park.

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- 3) What other organizations provide interpretive services in your park area?

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