

## **The Buffalo Soldier Story**

In late September of this year PBS will launch a new documentary film series by Ken Burns entitled "The National Parks: America's Best Idea." The six-part film promises to tell the story behind the creation of some of our greatest national treasures and begin a vigorous dialog around the prospects of continuing their preservation into the future. Through the power of radio and the broad reach of the Internet independent media producer James Edward Mills proposes the initiation of a parallel discussion that will raise awareness for the National Park System in conjunction with the film's release among a segment of population that has been sorely under represented in the world of outdoor recreation.

African-Americans played a pivotal role in the creation of Yosemite National Park. At the turn of the last century, more 400 members of the 9th Calvary, an all black unit of the U.S. Army known as the Buffalo Soldiers, patrolled both Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks starting in 1903. Upon their return from service in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War, the 9<sup>th</sup> Calvary was stationed at the Presidio in San Francisco. But they had no mission. So the unit was charged with the task of protecting these newly designated National Parks from forest fires, timber thieves, game poachers and unauthorized cattle grazing. In effect, the Buffalo Soldiers were Yosemite's first park rangers.

This fascinating story is virtually unknown even among the most ardent supporters of the National Park System. And despite this early contribution to its creation, numbers of African-American visitors to Yosemite and other National Parks around the country are conspicuously low. In an effort to raise awareness for the roles African-Americans and other ethnic minorities have played in the preservation of wild scenic places of our country, Mills is embarking upon an exciting new venture to tell this story.

In cooperation with Wisconsin Public Radio and the nationally syndicated radio program "To The Best of Our Knowledge," Mills will produce a short audio documentary feature on the Buffalo Soldiers of Yosemite. To be recorded on location this story will detail the historical circumstances behind one of the first concerted efforts to project and preserve wilderness for public recreation. As part of a broader program, this feature will be included in a series of interviews produced and broadcast in conjunction with the Ken Burns film series.

It is the intension of this story on the Buffalo Soldiers to stimulate a broader conversation within the African-American community. By making known the historical legacy of blacks in the early days of the National Park system it may be possible to boost their interest in exploring more of what natural settings have to offer. At this point of engagement environmental outreach organizations and conservation groups could begin to encourage more people of color to realize that they too have a role to play in the protection and preservation of wilderness for future generations.