

SUGGESTED POLICY STATEMENT RELATING TO DEVELOPMENT, USE AND OPERATION OF STATE PARKS

This statement was prepared by a Committee consisting of Frank D. Quinn, National Conference on State Parks, Harold S. Wagner, American Institute of Park Executives, George E. Dickie, National Recreation Association, and Sidney S. Kennedy, National Park Service. Adopted 1955 by the National Conference on State Parks.

Many park people are deeply concerned over the possibility that some recent developments and trends may lead to impairment or destruction of state park values for which the parks have been established. Included among these trends are: (1) continuing increase in attendance and use, (2) aggressive advertising of parks as tourist attractions, (3) non-conforming uses, (4) development of overnight accommodations, (5) over-emphasis on development of income producing facilities, (6) attempts at self-support, and (7) inappropriate forms of commercialism.

Many of the present day state park systems include two general kinds or types of parks. The first includes areas of scenic, scientific, and historical interest of state-wide significance established primarily to preserve them for public enjoyment and education--and it is principally this type of state park that was developed prior to the late twenties.

The scenic and natural areas are usually characterized by spaciousness and a sense of freedom from outside influences. They are selected for their intrinsic values and without regard to population distribution. Facilities are provided for the safety, comfort, and convenience of the visitors in enjoying the features and attractions and also, in some cases, overnight accommodations. Facilities for kinds of recreation appropriate to the areas, such as hiking, fishing, swimming, boating, horseback riding, picnicking, and camping are frequently provided where there is adequate room and where they will not destroy park values. Although such areas are not acquired specifically to serve the non-urban recreation needs of any particular locality, they frequently do so as a by-product. Well-known examples of this kind of state park are Point Lobos Reserve and the Redwoods parks in California, Itasca State Park in Minnesota, Petit Jean in Arkansas, Niagara Reservation in New York, Cumberland Falls in Kentucky and Highlands Hammock in Florida.

In recent years the States have increasingly assumed responsibility for establishing a second kind of state park specifically to meet the recreation needs of their citizens. This kind of area, which is often times designated as a state recreation area, is designed largely to provide recreation opportunities close to population concentrations. In the selection of such areas, consideration is given to scenic quality but location, access, and adaptability to recreation use are paramount. State areas of this kind,

however, supplement rather than supplant the efforts and responsibilities of county, metropolitan, and municipal agencies to provide local facilities.

Examples of this kind of area are the 13 new state recreation areas near Detroit, Laurel Hill State Park in Pennsylvania, Kentucky Lake State Park in Kentucky, Lake Murray State Park in Oklahoma, Jones Beach and Bethpage state parks on Long Island, and most of the South Dakota state parks that have been acquired in the eastern section of the State since World War II.

The distinction between state parks and state recreation areas is not usually reflected by their names. Uniform and appropriate nomenclature such as state parks, state historical parks, state beach parks, state recreation areas might be helpful and it has been advocated by many.* Although adoption of any such nomenclature by all of the States appears remote for various reasons, the characteristics of these different kinds of areas are generally understood and accepted.

The following suggested state park policies are aimed primarily at the scenic-scientific-historical preserve type of park; however, they are many times applicable also to the recreation type of park:

1. Non-conforming land uses such as hunting, logging and other commercial forestry practices, grazing and mining, sites for schools, power developments and other non-park structures, and rights-of-way should not be permitted except in the most unusual circumstances and in the absence of satisfactory alternatives. Merely the availability of a "free site" or existence of "unused resources" cannot be considered as justification for non-conforming uses of park lands.

Good management practice and common sense, however, are believed to justify exceptions such as the salvage of wind-blown timber in the Adirondacks to prevent a serious fire hazard, and controlled hunting of deer in Itasca State Park to prevent the destruction of the undercover.

2. Hotels, lodges, and cabins are frequently desirable to enable visitors to obtain full and satisfactory enjoyment of the parks. They should be considered, however, solely as an essential means of serving and accommodating those who visit the parks to enjoy the natural environment. It is generally accepted that state parks are reserves, not resorts.

3. Interpretive services such as nature guides, historical guides, campfire programs, museums, natural trails, trailside exhibits, and printed pamphlets are excellent and sometimes indispensable means of informing the public concerning an area's history, physiographic features, and plant and animal life. They should be encouraged and provided to an appropriate extent.

4. Operation of hotels and related cabin developments, and restaurants are frequently best handled by a concessionaire under contract with the state park agency. The most successful concession operation usually results when the facilities are state owned and when the concession contract provides for a high degree of state control. Sometimes other facilities such as bathhouses, boats, and saddle horses are also successfully handled by concessionaires. However, the operation of an en-

tire park by a concessionaire, or the permitting of a concessionaire to dominate the park operation should be avoided.

5. The sale of souvenirs such as postcards, books, handicraft, and other items related to or indigenous to the locale is appropriate and should be encouraged. Good taste seems to indicate that there should be no attempt to sell miscellaneous items bearing no relation to the parks simply because they will sell or because the operation will result in additional profit.

6. Based upon the almost universally accepted theory that those who actually use the parks should pay more toward their operation and maintenance than the general taxpayer, charges are frequently made for special facilities and services such as bathhouses, boats, riding horses, campgrounds, and parking of automobiles. A few of the States impose an entrance fee. It is believed, however, that caution should be exercised in attempting to make the state parks fully self-supporting. Such a goal may easily lead to developments and operations such as installation of catch-penny devices, over-emphasis on the sale of souvenirs, and development of resort-type facilities primarily to attract tourists and make a profit. These kinds of things may, in turn, impair the parks and defeat the purpose for which they were established.

7. In recent years, funds obtained through issuance of revenue bonds have been used on several occasions to construct state park hotels, lodges, and cabins. This means of financing may be satisfactory provided that it does not constitute a lien on the state parks or vest control of park operations in the bond holders.

8. The impact of increased attendance and use should be alleviated in many cases by expansion of facilities in existing parks or by acquisition and development of new parks or recreation areas or by both.

* A suggested classification for state parks is included in a report entitled, "Suggested Criteria for Evaluating Areas Proposed for Inclusion in State Park Systems" which was prepared by a committee of the National Conference on State Parks, adopted by its Board of Directors at the 1954 Annual Meeting, and published in the December 1954 issue of PLANNING AND CIVIC COMMENT.