In this issue: The adverse impacts of people on national park environments continue to increase . . . Some options for dealing with the problems.

NATIONAL PARKS AT THE CROSSROADS: DRAWING THE LINE WHERE PROTECTION ENDS AND OVERUSE BEGINS

From Cape Cod to Point Reyes, choice areas to live and vacation in are subjected to increasing debasement from overcrowding and overdevelopment. At the same time, countervailing efforts to protect prized environments are being made by many communities and by the federal and some state governments (see August 1971 and August 1972 CF Letters).

Also confronting difficult growth problems is the National Park Service, custodian of 285 areas, including 38 national parks and a variety of national recreation areas, seashores, lakeshores, scenic rivers, trails, parks, monuments and historic sites. This CF Letter deals with options for managing major natural parks in the public interest.

Some see threats to the parks as early warning signals. Said the Council on Environmental Quality's third annual report last month: "Encroachments on the parks and what the nation does about them are a test of its resolve to improve the quality of all sectors of our environment." Actually, park problems exist in tandem with those of cities and other areas. Just as the Park Service is moving to prohibit private autos in some park areas, so are some cities starting to ban cars from certain blocks. Both parks and cities are beginning to show signs of capitalizing on the potential of bus and rail service. Similarly, just as the Park Service is starting to regulate the flow of visitors and development in some park areas, and is expected to resort to reservation systems, so are some communities contemplating or taking the first steps to control population growth and development.

Present zoning restrictions and temporary denials of building permits or sewer hook-ups are likely to evolve into stiffer regulatory measures. Rand Corp. demographer Peter Morrison, according to an article in the August 21 issue of Time, "believes that the federal government may have to adopt population-distribution policies; if not, localities may resort to residency permits and migrant entry fees to prevent being 'loved to death'."

Carrying Capacity

It is axiomatic that for any given park or section of a park -- at some point and at some time -- a line must be drawn between use and preservation.
At some threshold, the development of facilities and accommodation of visitors must give way to protection. Otherwise the natural resource loses its original appeal and its value to every user is diminished. Quality is displaced by quantity.

A first basic step is to adopt a master plan premised on a judgment of the appropriate "carrying capacity" of a park. This judgment should be a political one, grounded in both expert evaluation of the resource and in the interests of the people who use or could use the park.

The Park Service's proposed master plan for Grand Teton National Park says that there are two "paramount considerations" which limit a resource's carrying capacity: (1) "the mandate to perpetuate the park's ecosystems in their most natural state," and (2) "the assurance of a quality visitor experience in each of the park's principal use zones."

The Conservation Foundation this month published a new study, "National Parks for the Future" (see box on page 3), in which a task force report listed three components of carrying capacity:

"1. Physical Carrying Capacity: This relates to the effect of visitation on the non-living aspects of the habitat. The ability of a particular terrain to resist trail erosion is one factor. So is its ability to "absorb" trails, roads, and other man-made objects. Conversely, when man-made features dominate the scene, the physical carrying capacity is exceeded. Space also determines carrying capacity . . . Only a few visitors can stand in a ruin at a time.

"2. Ecological Carrying Capacity: This concerns the effect of visitors on park ecosystems. When the natural plant and animal features are substantially altered, ecological carrying capacity is exceeded and the preservation function aborted . . . The 'fishing-out' of a lake or stream is another illustration, as is the effect on flora of pasturing a horse on a mountain meadow. The ability to dispose of visitor wastes without damage to park ecosystems may prove to be the ultimate measure of ecological carrying capacity.

"3. Psychological Carrying Capacity: The most subtle and difficult, but in many ways the most important, component of carrying capacity concerns the effect of other visitors on the mind of the individual visitor . . . Levels of tolerance for other people vary, of course. At one extreme is the person for whom the sight (and even the knowledge) of one other camper or camping party in the vicinity detracts from the quality of the experience. At the other extreme are those whose chief delight in a park experience comes from association with fellow visitors. For them an empty campground would not only be a disappointment but a positively frightening prospect."

Dr. Rowan Rowntree, of Syracuse University, speaking at a symposium conducted as part of the CF study, noted another important dimension of carrying capacity: "Obviously, it cannot be a question of only how many people use a park, but of the way in which they use it. And the notion of visitor management suggests that there are ways of using parks so that park values are not diminished."

The CF study noted the paucity of solid information on carrying capacities. It called for an accelerated research effort -- with specially designated appro-
AN OUTSIDE APPRAISAL

The Conservation Foundation's report "National Parks for the Future" was commissioned by the National Parks Centennial Commission as part of its plans to commemorate the 100th birthday of the National Park System. It was funded under a $170,000 Park Service contract. The Commission asked CF to arrange a citizens' appraisal of the parks, "identifying the basic problems and issues confronting the National Park System today and those anticipated in the future . . . (and to develop) a statement of philosophy and long-range objectives and goals with implementation recommendations."

Among those participating in the one-year study, in addition to project coordinator Robert T. Dennis and other CF staff members, were 34 advisors, some 200 participants at a symposium, and 30 individuals who made up five task forces. In addition to environmentalists, task force members included those who traditionally have had little involvement with park policies -- urban planners, labor spokesmen, college students and minority representatives. (The final 254-page report contains CF's own concluding recommendations, five task force reports, and 11 selected talks and project papers. The report is available from CF, $3.50 prepaid.)

Appropriations -- in both natural and behavioral sciences. "National park managers must be able to determine carrying capacity limits, based on both ecosystem science and new insights into human needs, expectations and preferences," it said. Meantime, one of the CF task forces recommended that the Park Service follow a policy of visitor limitation based on "conservative best judgment" criteria.

Preservation vs. Use

The Conservation Foundation's study has come down hard in favor of preserving natural park values -- and against the kind of intensive use, development and auto traffic that is incompatible with those values. "We recommend that the National Park System reassert its traditional role as conservator of the timeless natural assets of the United States," it said.

This, of course, has often been the traditional conservationist posture, which is frequently branded "elitist" for appearing to cater only to those few with a special affinity for wilderness communion. Indeed, Interior Secretary Rogers C. B. Morton, whose domain includes the National Park Service, was himself quick to challenge the CF recommendations on banning auto traffic and various kinds of development:

"The concern I have about the report is . . . (that) we're going to begin to discriminate against the elderly, the traveling families who have only a very limited time and modest budgets to visit the parks, and probably narrow the constituency of the parks to only those such as back packers and others who are able to spend the time and have the inclination to camp in the wilderness." (UPI, September 17, 1972.)

Yet the CF study implies criticism of the Park Service itself for failing to provide for low-income, elderly and other restricted groups. There is no mass
transportation to the parks and little within it, it is argued, so people are forced to come in cars; many accommodations are expensive; many campsites are designed for fancy trailers. "As it is now, they're subsidizing the middle and upper-class park users," said one critic. "Morton can't have it both ways."

In conducting its study, the Conservation Foundation also tried to recognize the dangers of slipping into undue emphasis on the natural environment. Thus, its symposium and task forces included people who, it was hoped, would represent the interests of the young, the urban poor and others not traditionally consulted on park issues. Even so, the result was heavy emphasis on limiting use so as to preserve the natural environments which make the parks worth coming to in the first place.

Most observers would agree that the typical confrontation between preservation and use in a park area should be resolved on the merits and in open forum. But the arguments can be thrown askew by the strong and pervasive influence of commercial interests such as the construction, automobile, gasoline, trailer and concession industries. Edward Abbey, in his book "Desert Solitaire" (Ballantine, New York, 1971), asked: "Why is the Park Service generally so anxious to accommodate that other crowd, the indolent millions born on wheels and suckled on gasoline, who expect and demand paved highways to lead them in comfort, ease and safety into every nook and corner of the national parks?"

The answer, he says, lies with the nature of "Industrial Tourism," or all the financial interests which are "well organized, command more wealth than most modern nations, and are represented in Congress with a strength far greater than is justified in any constitutional or democratic sense ... Through Congress the tourism industry can bring enormous pressure to bear upon such a slender reed in the Executive Branch as the poor old Park Service, a pressure which is also exerted on every other possible level -- local, state, regional -- and through advertising and the well-established habits of a wasteful nation.

"When a new national park ... is set up, the various forces of Industrial Tourism, on all levels, immediately expect action -- meaning specifically a road-building program ... 'Parks are for people' is the public-relations slogan, which decoded means that the parks are for people-in-automobiles."

When the Park Service shows an interest in restricting auto traffic to alleviate crowding -- as it has begun to do of late -- it may run into a cross-fire from pro-development forces. Master plans proposed for Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks would clamp down on road building and cars, but at recent hearings on the plans, state government and business representatives strongly urged expansion instead. So the Park Service is caught in the middle.

Alternatives to cars can also stir up the wrath of environmentalists. When Congress established the North Cascades National Park in 1968, it forbade construction of roads in several areas. It is proposed instead to haul visitors to key scenic peaks by building two tramways. But many conservationists view this as simply an alternate desecration.

Every unit of the National Park System is unique and, the Foundation's study concluded, should be planned and managed according to its own merits and characteristics -- its natural values, its carrying capacity, visitor demand and public preferences. Yet Congress and the large administrative bureaucracy impose policies which tend to excessive rigidity rather than flexibility.

For example, it is disturbing to many environmentalists that a number of large,
new, essentially natural areas, instead of being designated National Parks, are being proclaimed National Recreation Areas, Seashores, Lakeshores and the like. What these latter have in common is a management policy under which recreation -- rather than protection of natural or historic features -- "shall be recognized as the dominant or primary resource objective . . . Primary emphasis shall be placed on active participation in outdoor recreation in a pleasing environment." ("Administrative Policies for Recreation Areas," National Park Service, revised August 1968.)

The results of this and other policies are roads, buildings, developed campgrounds, marinas, hotels, recreation facilities, and other accommodations. Hunting and fishing are encouraged, and in some areas timber harvesting and grazing as well. But the Foundation suggests that classification of such areas as Assateague Island and Point Reyes National Seashores as recreation rather than natural areas does not mean that their impressive natural qualities should be more expendable than those of national parks.

The distinction was dramatically illustrated last March when it was suddenly revealed that the Park Service, back in 1968, had granted the Corps of Engineers permission to thrust a wave research pier from unspoiled Assateague Island more than 500 yards into the Atlantic Ocean. In the midst of the resulting uproar, Assateague's superintendent was quoted as pointing out that Congress, in legis-

"NOT SCATTERED OASES"

"Let us accept the conceit of a green world in which different emotional and intellectual responses are available -- as fundamental to the human condition, a requirement of a civilized being; and ask that these availabilities be extended to an ever growing number of citizens . . . . National, regional and local parks together must form so massive an area of open space that no man is deprived of its advantages. One might consider an ideal series of parks as you might a great water system, using the metaphor of green water in massive lakes emptying into larger rivers and small creeks, making narrowly over waterfalls and flowing placidly and broadly through the flat countryside in a continuous sequence of parklands. Then it curls around and through cities in man-determined forms, held back by reservoirs, channeled over aqueducts and finally rising -- as in Rome, in fountains, small ones in dusty corners and large, baroque ones in mighty plazas. Thus, the fields and trees of parks should be, as water, not scattered oases such as Yosemite, but a weaving, interconnected green mass that changes in size and purpose, but always inter-penetrates forcibly but gently the urban, suburban, and rural scene. A dialectical relationship between parkland and urban area is created that might be said, in Marxwell's terms, to parallel a dialogue within each of us between knowing and changing, on the one hand, and feeling and accepting, on the other. Or to put it in social terms, a dialectic between a growth economy, on the one hand, and a balanced organic state, on the other."

-- William M. Roth, past chairman, San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association, at CP Symposium.
lating the Seashore, "did not create a national park. It created a national recreation area."

The plan for the pier was quickly put to rest, but the basic problem remains. Conservationists have suggested that Park Service policy be adjusted to give top priority to protecting natural values wherever they exist. Also a planning system could be used in which parks are less categorized, and in which the complex trade-offs between preservation and use can be assessed more on a park-by-park basis. This leads, in turn, to the question of whether park planning and management decisions are to be made chiefly by bureaucrats who are far from the scenery, and upon whom commercial interests may be pressing, or whether they should be shaped by direct input from members of the public most concerned.

Citizen Participation

The most logical way to provide broad public participation in park affairs, CF found, is to set up citizens' advisory committees for the parks -- and then take their recommendations to heart. In its report, the Foundation recommended that "the full range of National Park Service policy-making, planning and management processes be opened to public view and that greatly expanded opportunities for citizen participation be provided . . . What is basically at issue here is whether or not the parks are, or can be, truly responsive to the needs of all Americans, not just those who are economically or politically involved in policy decisions, and not just the suburban, white, middle-class visitors who currently fit the 'average visitor' profile."

CF recommended that the development of master plans, and all later major planning documents, include citizen participation throughout the planning process, and that plans be available to the public in draft form prior to adoption. Five-year development schedules should be public documents, it added. The Foundation further recommended:

"A citizens' advisory committee should be established for each sizeable unit of the park system . . . In every case, three kinds of people should be represented on these commissions and each group should participate in the selection of its own representatives: (1) persons with professional, scientific and technical skills or special knowledge relevant to the unit; (2) representatives of the local, state and regional governments involved; and (3) representative park users and potential users from both near and far. These commissions should be consulted by park superintendents on policy-making and management matters, as well as on planning, and should have broad charters to speak out on their own initiative."

What is the current situation with respect to citizen participation? The Park Service generally does not hold public hearings on its master plans for newly authorized areas; and there is often little or no follow-up participation by the public. In any case, the master plan process embodies other problems, as discussed by Robert Twiss, professor of landscape architecture at the University of California, Berkeley. Speaking for a group at the CF symposium, he said:

"We feel that master plans are highly conceptual, and that it's very difficult to perform environmental impact review on such conceptual plans. It is also difficult to get public involvement, other than purely philosophical agreement or disagreement with concepts. We need more exacting land-use and environmental plans for the parks, which make sense to people . . . so that several realistic alternatives might be compared . . . Rather than sweeping conflicts 'under the
Neither the Park Service nor the Administration has ever asked Congress to set up an advisory committee for a particular park, and in fact the latter has opposed such committees (in connection with pending legislation to create a Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Cumberland Island National Seashore). Congress itself, however, has set up advisory commissions in recent years for 15 units of the park system. The problem is that they are not necessarily representative of broad public interests.

In August 1970, Congress also authorized the Secretary of Interior to establish other advisory groups as he may wish, and instead of committees for individual parks, the Administration prefers one regional advisory committee for each of the Park Service's six regions. At present, members have been appointed by Secretary Morton to only three of these committees. It does not seem likely, in any case, that these will reflect a very wide diversity of opinion. Among the nine members of the Western Regional Advisory Committee announced on September 10, for example, there is evidently considerable interest in the outdoors; but five of the members are associated with industry.

The Secretary of Interior also has an overall Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments. CF, in its report, said this Board should be reorganized, and expanded if necessary, to make it representative of the broad range of social and economic groups that comprise our national community.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

The park problem largest in many minds -- the deterioration of environmental quality from the impact of too many people, too many cars and other vehicles, and too much development to accommodate people's needs -- has many facets, and many suggestions have been put forth to solve it. Some major options are discussed below.

Dealing With the Automobile

The major villain, in the eyes of many, is the automobile. "Let the people walk," exhorted Abbey in "Desert Solitaire." "Or ride horses, bicycles, mules, wild pigs -- anything -- but keep the automobiles and the motorcycles and all their motorized relatives out. We have agreed not to drive our automobiles into cathedrals, concert halls, art museums, legislative assemblies, private bedrooms and other sanctums of our culture; we should treat our national parks with the same deference, for they, too, are holy places."

The CF study had these comments and recommendations:

"Automobiles can destroy our national park heritage just as surely as they have made our cities inhumane and dangerous to limb and lung and have desecrated much of the metropolitan countryside. We believe that automobiles are inconsistent with the preservation mission, with what is called the 'park experience,' and with even the most rudimentary ethic. It is not now feasible to recommend that private automobiles be banned from every unit of the National Park System, but that would be our choice. We do recommend this: first, an immediate moratorium on road building, parking lots, and other auto-oriented improvement; second, appointment by the Secretary of the Interior of a special commission to study the entire question of private automobiles in the parks and alternative methods of intra-park transportation.

"We suggest that this commission be charged not with identifying a few areas
MEETING URBAN NEEDS

Recognizing the dearth of major park areas within easy access of big cities, the Conservation Foundation study of national parks recommended a "specific and urgent" acquisition program. It urged that a special task force "prepare an inventory and evaluation of sizeable natural areas within striking distance of large cities for addition to the National Park System." Point Reyes, Indiana Dunes and Fire Island were cited as existing models of such parks, and new opportunities are suggested in the Chesapeake Bay region and the Pine Barrens of New Jersey. Proposals for two "Gateway" parks in San Francisco and New York are pending in Congress, and CF recommended that the Gateways and other parks near metropolitan areas be heavily supported financially by the federal government, but be managed and operated by state, regional or local agencies rather than the National Park Service. "For parks are at the center of a community's character; they reflect and strengthen the sense of place and identity that make cities fit places for people."

"Near-city parks should be brought close to urban residents by imaginative transportation planning," the CF study said. It suggested that the Park Service cooperate with the Department of Transportation and other agencies on demonstration projects for public transit to Cape Cod, Point Reyes and Indiana Dunes.

The study also proposed a nationwide Federal Recreation Information System which would include walk-in offices in urban centers, and would make a special effort to attract minority groups and other non-users of parks. "While the city dweller cannot be expected to make a blind leap directly from sidewalk to alpine trail," CF said, "he can be encouraged to experience the parks on their own terms."

(For a more extensive discussion of urban park and recreation problems and opportunities, see the March 1972 CF Letter.)

where automobiles should be proscribed, but with the reverse. The commission should assume that paved roads and the autos that use them essentially compromise park management policy. Its determinations should focus on exceptions to a general policy of automobile prohibition . . .

"Within the parks, every rational effort should be made to separate the visitor from his car and encourage him to travel on foot, by horse, by bus, by park train, by tramway, or other means. Visitors should be asked to leave automobiles and automobile homes alike at the park's edge, there to transfer to an intra-park public system, such as the Yosemite propane-powered buses . . ."

"In regard to transportation to and from parks, concessioners could be specially franchised to offer 'package' services including access transportation from nearby railheads or airports and from nearby tourist accommodations. Perhaps Amtrak could provide special park access services, with a European-type railroad pass for those who plan trips to several parks."

As noted, some beginning steps have been taken in these directions. Cars have been banned from the intolerably congested eastern end of Yosemite Valley, and people now use free and frequent sightseeing buses and trams which they can climb off and on at frequent stops. This system has received much favorable
comment, and the Park Service is beginning to use or develop similar alternatives to cars in such parks as the Everglades, Grand Canyon and Mount McKinley. At the latter, for example, people with a campground reserved will be allowed to drive to it, but they must leave their vehicle and use a shuttle service.

Providing Services Outside the Parks

Closely related are suggestions that inappropriate facilities -- which act as magnets to people in cars -- be removed from parks to areas outside their boundaries. The CF study stated:

"If the parks are to be meaningful to all Americans, everyone must feel welcome. For many visitors, this requires a somewhat civilized base of operations: a dry room, a bed with sheets, a recognizable kitchen or public eating place. At the same time, resort accommodations and shopping centers do not belong in national parks . . . (nor do) souvenir and trinket shops, swimming pools, bars, barber shops, golf courses and tennis courts.

"Nor do camping and picnic areas which are so designed and congested as to bring urban scenes and urban problems . . . We do not believe the Park Service is obliged to provide camp sites equipped with electric outlets, running water, or toilet hook-ups. Moreover, completely modern homes on wheels are contrary to the park ethic."

One of the task forces said that "all visitor facilities which can be provided outside of park boundaries should be built there rather than inside the parks. Present facilities, such as lodging, curio shops and parking lots, now located inside, should be phased out wherever practicable." It added that re-location should take place in conjunction with development of public transportation between the parks and facilities outside them.

In the same vein, the CF study recommended that non-profit, quasi-public corporations -- rather than private concessioners -- operate facilities needed within parks. "The concessioner has a disproportionate influence on planning and policy-making for the national parks," CF found. "His objective is to generate as much demand for the services he provides as is possible. This is thoroughly understandable, but it too often brings the people to the parks for the wrong reasons. The predictable result is that the concessioner makes a case for further facilities to accommodate a market that he -- not the parks -- has created. In some cases, these new facilities are utterly inappropriate."

A contrary view was expressed at the CF symposium in Yosemite National Park by Park Service Director George B. Hartzog, Jr: "Some of the innovations in park management that have contributed so much to the quality of our park experience here bespeaks eloquently the effectiveness of the government-private-enterprise partnership that exists here in providing for the visitors to Yosemite. As one example . . . perhaps the shuttle system that operates in this valley would not be in operation today had the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. not advanced $125,000 of its private money to test its feasibility long in advance of its approval by the Administration and the Congress."

The movement of facilities outside park boundaries, and the existence of unattractive, honky-tonk, "gateway" communities which can be seen from some parks, suggested to one task force the need for each park master plan to "reflect an understanding of the dynamic relationship between the park and the 'park-influence zone,'" and in fact to embody proposals for this zone as well as the park itself.

CF recommended that the federal government cooperate with state and local
governments in regional planning for parks and their influence zones. "The small gateway communities around national parks, in the absence of a carefully drawn and enforced land-use plan, typically become sprawling, billboarded and neon-lighted tourist-exploitation centers . . . The Park Service should not plan the future of the parks independently" of surrounding lands and resources. The Service's lack of authority to engage in comprehensive, regional planning results in "an unfortunate tendency for the Park Service to plan each park to be unnecessarily self-sufficient . . ."

Zoning and Use Controls

Sections within a park can be limited to particular uses, under a sort of zoning. Indeed, in the master plan process, lands within each park are assigned to one of six land-use classifications designed to channel environmental impacts. The six are: high density areas, general outdoor recreation areas, natural environment areas, unique natural areas, historic sites and cultural sites. But classifications are by no means a cure-all. It remains necessary to decide such thorny questions as what future demand for an area will be, and to what extent it should be accommodated.

Another important "zoning" technique is to protect roadless areas within national parks and recreation areas by designating them as wilderness areas under the Wilderness Act of 1964. The first phase of this continuing process calls for designation by 1974 of such areas within 60 National Park System

"BUY BACK AMERICA"

"Major new sources of federal funds must be developed to meet pressing needs for parks in the neighborhoods and communities of urban areas that are home to four out of five Americans," said the Conservation Foundation study. "We recommend two such sources as both practical prospects and appropriate policy initiatives." One is a capital gains tax on revenues from sales of undeveloped lands. "Much, if not most, of this revenue is derived from speculative land sales in and around metropolitan areas. There is a kind of poetic justice in dedicating (such) tax revenues . . . to the acquisition and development of public park and open spaces."

CF also suggested a 5% excise tax on recreational vehicles and equipment: "This would produce new sources of revenue from sales of such items as trailers, campers, trail bikes, boats, camping equipment, sporting goods, and related equipment and supplies. Such a tax is now imposed on sporting arms and ammunition (11%) and on fishing gear (10%) . . .

One of the CF study's task forces made a separate recommendation for a $100 billion national bond issue to "Buy Back America" -- for land acquisition, capital development, and improvement of the national, state, city and county park systems. The task force said: "A rough estimate indicates that $100 billion would provide funds sufficient for the acquisition of nearly 52 million acres of land, including 8,608 acres for vest-pocket parks, with a residual of $32 billion for development and improvement."
units. There has been constant pressure from those who seek more generous reservations of land for wilderness protection and wilderness-type usage.

There are, in addition, management techniques for diversion of visitors away from the most impacted places in a park to other areas. Examples include information programs, changed circulation systems and relocation of facilities.

Many types of use restrictions are available, such as limiting duration of visits, and requiring permits for particular recreation activities. The CF study noted further that, through interpretive and education programs, natural and ecological values can be communicated to the public, thereby decreasing its often callous disregard for park environments.

Limiting the Number of Visitors

A much-discussed technique for protecting natural park values is restricting the number of visitors allowed to enter a park, or visit a special feature or facility within the park. A CF task force discussed six methods of limiting visitor use to carrying capacity:

1. Market rationing by means of raised fees: "It is wildly inappropriate that one should qualify for a wilderness experience according to how successful one is in the antithetical world of the marketplace." (Others have simply said that charging high fees is totally out of character for our society, and would discriminate against the poor, the young, etc.) "Market rationing is also impractical in that fees would have to be set very high to have a significant effect . . ."

2. A first-come-first-served system: "This would so discriminate against the millions of Americans taking long vacation trips as to be politically infeasible."

3. A reservation system: "Wilderness was seen to be open, free, spontaneous and unconstrained, and reservations the opposite . . . (We had a) profound fear of the psychological erosion of the wilderness experience . . . A reservation system is well-suited to the style of vacationing and park use of the traditional middle-class park visitors, people who are accustomed to making advance arrangements, who know in the spring when they will take their summer vacation, and where and with whom they will go. However, a reservation system is extremely ill-suited to the styles of life and park use of the young, styles long on spontaneity and woefully short on planning."

4. A lottery system: "Seems unwieldy, unlikely, and raises the specter of both a vast administrative apparatus and an inevitable black market. Yet it is undeniably the most egalitarian device possible."

5. Limitations on length of stay: "Useful, but this device seems to be entirely inadequate to cope with the magnitude of the problem in the future."

6. Built-in frictions: "These are largely a matter of failing to provide paved roads, lodging, stores, or training for the convenience of visitors."

Of the six options, the task force proposed that built-in frictions "be considered the first line of defense and relied upon where and whenever possible." It further suggested that, when formal limitations on access are necessary, "a combined system of X percent reservations and Y percent spaces on a first-come-first-served basis should be employed, providing for both those who plan ahead and those who do not."

The future, of course, is already upon us. This past summer, for example, the
Park Service experimented with a permit system to limit the number of overnight backpackers in certain wilderness trail areas of three parks -- Great Smoky Mountains, Rocky Mountain and Sequoia-Kings Canyon -- where trails and facilities have been overcrowded and abused.

Most California state parks and several private parks are on a Ticketron computer reservation system for campsites. Reservations can be made up to 90 days ahead, and alternative choices are provided. Southern beach areas turn people away every day in the summer, while many inland parks are never filled to capacity, state officials say.

Increasing the Supply

Acquisition of new parks is another obvious and important way to reduce visitor pressures on existing areas. Emphasis in the CF study was on the need for parks near urban areas. (See box on page 8.) One of the task forces also noted that certain types of terrain are "grossly under-represented" in the National Park System. They include the northern Great Plains, short-grass prairies and the Arctic tundra. It added that there is an "urgent need for a focused national program to protect the nation's diminishing island, marine and estuarine resources which have significant scientific, natural and recreational values."

The task force noted that since the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation's three-year study of threatened islands was completed in 1970, "little has been done."

An expansion of private recreation areas would also help. As the Council on Environmental Quality's 1972 annual report put it:

"The need is greatest for quality recreation opportunities that can begin to draw away from the overloaded national and state parks those people who would be satisfied at private parks or campgrounds but who now resist going to private sites that are often only crowded trailer parks."

Finally, the CF study noted that, through information programs and promotion of alternative parks, the public can be encouraged to visit those that are less crowded. A nationwide information system, CF said, could "help the citizen determine how and where to spend his leisure time -- at federal, state or local facilities -- to best satisfy his own needs in ways compatible with various recreation resources."