

PROGRESS REPORT ON RESOURCE CONSERVATION

By Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay

I am proud of the record of the Department of the Interior in strengthening and advancing the cause of conservation. This record reflects the Administration's comprehensive policy on resource conservation and development.

The cry of "give away" has been raised in connection with the administration of our national park system. Here's what the record actually shows:

National Park System: The national park system today is larger, more adequately staffed and more efficiently administered than it ever has been. The Department added 65,000 acres to our national park system in 1953, the year this Administration entered office. The boundaries of the Everglades National Park were extended to take in an additional 271,000 acres. Last year 40,400 acres were acquired. In the first 9 months of 1955 the Department added 29,560 acres to the park system.

Two new and historically important areas were added to the system with the establishment of Fort Vancouver National Monument in 1954 and Cumberland Gap National Historical Park in 1955. Establishment of Fort Union National Memorial in New Mexico was authorized last year and the National Park Service now is in the process of acquiring necessary lands. The West Virginia portion of the Harpers Ferry National Monument has been accepted for administration pending formal establishment of the area upon tender of the Maryland portion.

Establishment of the City of Refuge National Historical Park in Hawaii, was authorized in legislation approved by the President in July 1955, and the Department has recommended that the Congress authorize establishment of a Virgin Islands National Park. Moreover, the Department has signified its willingness to designate Chimney Rock, Nebraska, and Promontory Point, Utah, as national historic sites in non-Federal ownership.

Important progress has been made toward fulfillment of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreation Area project and all but 5,000 of the 28,500 acres within the project boundaries have been acquired. Negotiations for the majority of tracts needed for the Independence National Historical Park are in their final stages.

The integrity of the national park system has been maintained under this Administration. Not only has the Department protected and extended park boundaries, but vigorous support has been given the National Park Service in resisting developments which would unjustifiably intrude upon the natural beauty of park areas. Among such proposals which the Department rejected were:

An effort to obtain authority to construct a dam at Glacier View which, if built, would flood 20,000 acres of Glacier National Park. REJECTED.

Efforts to obtain permits for construction of tramways at Mount Rainier National Park, Rocky Mountain National Park, Crater Lake National Park, and Grand Canyon National Park. REJECTED.

Efforts to modify the newly extended boundaries of Olympic National Park. REJECTED.

Efforts to construct a TV transmission tower in Scotts Bluff National Monument. REJECTED.

Efforts to open Joshua Tree National Monument to mineral prospecting and mining, or to abolish it altogether. REJECTED.

Protection of Joshua Tree National Monument was strengthened when 10,000 acres inside the Monument boundaries were acquired in exchange for 10,000 acres of federally owned grazing land outside the Park.

Negotiations with the Department of the Navy resulted in withdrawal of the proposal to use a considerable portion of Death Valley National Monument as an aerial gunnery range.

The Corps of Engineers decided after interagency discussions that construction of levees within Grand Teton National Park was not urgently necessary for protection against floods on the Snake River.

One of the first acts of this Administration was to reverse the unfortunate 15-year cycle of neglect of our parks which was touched off by World War II and prolonged by the Korean conflict. An Administration program calling for substantial increases in parks appropriations has been approved by the Congress.

In January 1953 the National Park Service was operating under a fiscal year budget of \$33,162,330.

For the current fiscal year the park budget is \$45,029,300--an increase of some 40 percent.

The new budget provides for 4,650 man-years employment in the parks system, an increase of 25 percent over the man years provided in the 1952-53 budget. One result has been to raise the park ranger force to its greatest strength in history.

Increased appropriations have enabled the National Park Service to make a good start on reducing the accumulated backlog of uncompleted and projected projects for road and trail construction and improvement of public facilities and park housing. Working cooperatively, the Park Service and concession operators have made great strides in development of a more realistic program for the modernization of privately operated facilities in the parks. For instance, in Grand Teton National Park, where travel has increased more than 500 percent over 1946, public use facilities are being developed in a program calling for an investment of more than \$5,000,000 in private capital; a building and expansion program under way at Grand Canyon National Park calls for expenditure of about \$1,000,000 by the concessioner; and similar forward looking programs are either under way or contemplated in other areas.

Gratifying progress is being made in the task of catching up with the demands being made upon the parks today. But that is not enough! The increasing number

of visitors to national park areas--21 million in 1946--about 50 million in 1955--demands action on a dynamic program which will place the Park Service in a position to cope with an expected visitor load of 80 million a decade hence.

Such a program is now being formulated by the National Park Service at the direction of the Department. Its preparation already has revitalized the Service. Called "Mission 66" its objective is to fully equip the national park system to carry out its basic purposes by 1966, the 50th anniversary of the Service.

I believe sincerely that "Mission 66" will prove to be the finest contribution to our national parks since the Service was established as a bureau of the Department of the Interior in 1916.

Wildlife Protection: False rumors of a "give away" of wildlife refuges and a "land grab" of refuge areas by the military have caused sincere conservationists much undue concern. Again, let's assay such rumors in the light of hard facts on the public records.

Not one acre of wildlife refuge area under the primary jurisdiction of the Fish and Wildlife Service has been transferred to the military since I have been Secretary of the Interior.

Since January 1953 the Department of the Interior has established 8 new wildlife refuges and 3 more are in the process of being established. During that period the Department acquired 79,946 additional acres for wildlife preservation through purchase, lease, or transfer of federally owned lands.

Under this Administration Federal wildlife refuges have been established for the first time in Kansas and Colorado and new lands have been added to the Federal refuge program in Louisiana, North Dakota, Kentucky, Tennessee, South Carolina, Texas, Washington, Florida, Maine, Oregon, Idaho, Michigan, and New York.

During the fiscal year ending June 30, 1955, wildlife refuges received the largest allocation ever made for acquisition, development, and maintenance. This totaled \$6,614,200 and was \$2 million more than the refuges had been allocated in the annual budget when this Administration assumed office.

It is gratifying to be able to report further that during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1955, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, of which the Secretary of the Interior is chairman, approved purchase of 30,189 acres of refuge lands at a cost of some \$645,000--the largest expenditure of Duck Stamp funds for refuge acquisition since 1945.

In administration of a national wildlife refuge program that has been carried out over a period of 52 years, it must be expected that some refuge areas would outlive their usefulness, especially where they were established to meet temporary emergencies until more efficient areas could be acquired.

In the 6 years preceding this Administration, for instance, 36 wildlife refuges were abolished. The total Federal wildlife reserves were reduced by 408,527 acres.

This Administration has dropped 7 refuges totaling 6,226 acres, made up of small units of low productivity, where administrative costs were not justified.

Secondary use for wildlife of the 56,954-acre Fort Keogh Refuge in Montana, administered by the Department of Agriculture, was relinquished by the Fish and Wildlife Service because of administrative duplication and limited wildlife values. Wildlife potentials of this area will continue to be maintained by the Department of Agriculture.

The Department has not and will not voluntarily surrender any refuge of proven value to wildlife as long as I am in office. Our program calls for the acquisition of additional areas to meet wildlife conservation needs. I regard wildlife refuges, as well as national parks and forests, as irreplaceable national assets whose value is clearly established.

A refuge of proven value is the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. Currently, the Department is negotiating with the Department of the Army in an effort to maintain the refuge boundaries intact. The Department's strong opposition to any reduction in the size of the Wichita Refuge was made known in 1953 and our position has not changed.

You will recall that in the last session of Congress legislation was enacted authorizing the expansion of Fort Sill which adjoins the Wichita Refuge. The Army's plans, as outlined before Congressional committees, called for the acquisition of some 20,000 acres of privately owned lands and the transfer of some 10,700 acres of the Wichita Refuge.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed an alternative plan under which the Refuge boundaries would remain intact while the Army would be permitted to set up areas within the Refuge from which projectiles could be fired to land on target areas within the military reservation.

On October 19, I wrote to Secretary of the Army Wilber M. Brucker, stating that I was unalterably opposed to the proposed transfer of land of the Wichita Refuge. I pointed out that under the proposal which this Department had made the integrity of the refuge would be preserved, the wildlife would be protected, and the public could use the buffer zone during the period when the Army was not firing.

The military establishments have been cooperative in allowing large areas over which they hold primary jurisdiction to be used as wildlife refuges. We are hopeful that a mutually satisfactory solution of the problem at Wichita can be found.

In this connection, a significant agreement between the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Corps of Engineers was completed in August 1954. Under this plan, the transfer of wildlife lands to the Service and to the State Conservation Departments has been expedited. The Service now assists the Corps of Engineers in conducting hearings at which there is full public consideration of the importance of integrating fish and wildlife protection measures into planning for flood control and navigation developments.

The national wildlife refuges, under the programs of this Administration, are contributing importantly to the Nation's recreational needs without interfering with the paramount conservation objectives for which the refuges were established. Last year over 5,200,000 persons visited the refuge areas, an increase of more than 11 percent over the 1953 record of visitors.

Greater protection is afforded existing wildlife reserves than existed when this Administration took office. For instance, regulations governing oil and gas leasing in wildlife reservations were issued in 1947--6 years before this Administration took office. Exploitation of these leases was under way in several refuges. Serious problems of pollution had arisen or were threatened.

Drastic action was taken to meet this inherited problem. On August 31, 1953, a "stop order" was issued holding up action on all new applications for oil and gas leases on wildlife refuges. That order was issued on August 31 and it is still in effect. Considerable pressure has been exerted to relax the "stop order" while revision of the inherited refuge oil lease regulations is under consideration. It has been, and remains, our announced determination that no new regulations will be authorized which do not afford the wildlife refuges greater protection than they had before the "stop order" was issued.

Public Lands and Forests: One of the most important conservation measures in many years--Public Law 167--was signed by President Eisenhower on July 23, 1955.

A major provision of this law gives the Department of the Interior authority to control surface resources on mining claims. This is a conservation tool for which I have worked ever since taking office.

Another major provision removed commonly occurring minerals such as sand, gravel, and cinders from the general mining laws and placed them under jurisdiction of the Materials Act of 1947.

Now, at long last, the Department has authority to end many of the abuses which had developed over the years under the old mining laws. Prior to enactment of Public Law 167, location of a mining claim conferred upon the locator rights of exclusive possession of the surface. It was possible to establish claims for low value minerals and acquire far more valuable surface resources, such as rich timber stands, or a summer home or business site, or a water hole on grazing land. Many such claims were established in our national forests and under the law the Government was required to honor them.

The Government now has the authority, prior to issuance of a patent on a mining claim, to manage the surface resources of the claim. This includes, of course, the cutting and sale of timber, grazing of livestock and use of the surface of the claim for access to adjacent lands.

Important measures for the conservation of the open public rangelands of the West have been taken by this Administration. The Department's new 20-year program for soil and moisture conservation is but one of the progressive steps that have been taken to conserve our important natural resources. Under this program, the Federal range is being reseeded and effective measures are being taken to halt heretofore unchecked erosion of the soil.

Good conservation calls for wise use without abuse of the vast expanses of public domain land beyond the boundaries of national park and wildlife refuge areas. Many citizens do not realize that the Federal Government still retains control of about one out of every four acres in the United States. As our population expands, so do public demands for use of undeveloped Federal acres. A number of laws provide that public domain lands must be transferred to private ownership when all requirements of those laws are met. This Department has the responsibility of so classifying the vacant public land that it is put to its highest use possible under the law. Often when the Department complies with the law--and I am sure that no citizen would want it to do otherwise--the cry of "give away" is raised in some political quarters. It is significant that not one allegation of "give away" has been, or can be, substantiated.

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