

NPS MAJOR PROGRAMS AND CONCERNS

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NATIONAL PARK RESERVES

HISTORICAL RECORDS TEAM  
DIVISION OF HISTORY  
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These documents were selected from the files of the Director, Office of Natural Science, and the Acting Chief, Division of Long Range Planning.

Since 1950, strip mining has rapidly become the primary method of producing coal. As concern for the adverse environmental effects of strip mining increased in the 1960's, many states enacted statutes requiring some degree of reclamation and established regulatory agencies. The Department of the Interior also became concerned with the reclamation of mined lands for productive use, particularly for recreation and improvement of the environment for fish and wildlife.

The Interior Department initiated two major programs to aid mined land restoration. The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation and the Bureau of Mines jointly began working with various States on pilot projects to reclaim mined lands of up to 5,000 acres in extent for recreation purposes. The other major component of Interior's program relates to national park reserves, a new park concept designed to help recycle mined lands for future park areas.

On November 4, 1971, Director Hartzog recommended that the Park Service enrich the "Legacy of the Parks" by incorporating some of the abused lands in the System through this concept. According to the Director, these reserves had several advantages for the Park Service as it met the challenges of the future. First, the concept could be implemented immediately with modest cash outlays for land acquisition since unreclaimed lands were of minimal value. Second, restoration would be a long-term project which could be accomplished with Job Corps, Youth Conservation Corps and volunteer efforts involving minor yearly funding. Third, the area would be removed from its "reserve" status when it was

healed and be designated a "national park." At that time in the future, the areas would be developed and managed for visitor use and enjoyment. Fourth, the fact that there are relatively few pristine natural areas meeting the high standards of traditional national parks makes reclamation imperative for the Park Service to meet the growing public demand for recreation. Fifth, since many of the strip mined areas are near the densely populated urban corridors along the East Coast, reclaimed lands for future parks would aid in the continuing emphasis on parks for urban areas. Together these advantages, according to the Director, would enable the Park Service to provide meaningful park experiences to the American people at relatively minor cost.

In February 1972, Secretary Morton endorsed the idea of studying the national park reserve concept. The Secretary's Advisory Board was requested to assist in this undertaking by developing criteria for the selection of areas as reserves and selecting a pilot area. A special subcommittee on national park reserves was established under the chairmanship of Mr. Peter Murphy to carry out these duties. Don Humphrey, Acting Chief, Division of Long Range Planning, was assigned as staff to the subcommittee.

National Park Service officials developed a preliminary statement of criteria with assistance from the Bureau of Mines. The statement indicated that reserves were to be located in natural regions and were to contain themes that are inadequately represented in the National Park System. Ordinarily, an area not less than 50,000 acres would be set aside, but a

smaller size would be justified if it adequately provided for the conservation and use of the values of the area. Efforts were to be made to find locations near urban centers but only after the aforementioned criteria were met. Reserves were to be established only on lands that have been affected by man's activities but which still display the basic natural geological surface structure on at least fifty percent of the area. The areas must also be determined to possess the potential for restoration of native plant and wildlife, though not in the same ecological relationship as in pre-Columbian times. As a "land bank" to be acquired now for future use following necessary reclamation, no immediate development for public use is intended.

Field work on the Appalachian Plateau took place throughout 1972 from Pennsylvania to Tennessee to select a pilot project site. Seven areas were tentatively identified as having potential as park reserves with the Cumberland Gap Region of Tennessee and Kentucky identified as best meeting the criteria. The subcommittee on national park reserves investigated this site in late November 1972 along with representatives of the conservation departments of both states, the Bureau of Mines, the Park Service and the Forest Service.

The subcommittee submitted its report on national park reserves to the Advisory Board on April 18, 1973. While the opinions of the field study group were mixed, the report recommended that a study team survey the Cumberland Gap area as to its best future use. The intent of the study would be to appraise its potential as a park reserve/recreational complex

as well as alternative future uses. While the study should not minimize the economic impact of a future park reserve on the area, the subcommittee felt that the study should concentrate on the social effects of alternative future uses and their impact on the people now living in the area. Accordingly, the subcommittee urged that a study be made of the area for the purpose of employing a comprehensive land use model outlined in the report. Thus, the subcommittee's findings indicated that the idea of park reserves could not be divorced from effective long-range land use planning.

Concurrent with the activities of the subcommittee, an interbureau task force was established on February 1, 1972, to analyze "Recreation, Fish and Wildlife and Other Resources Use of Mined Lands." The report to be submitted March 27, 1972, was for the purpose of formulating the 1974 fiscal year Mined Area Restoration program. The Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks and the Assistant Secretary--Mineral Resources were responsible for the development of this analytical paper. Among other suggestions, the report recommended an inventory of mined land problems in order to formulate programs for resource improvement and the elimination of the worse excesses of mining land scars. Such an inventory would require several years and legislation and new funding sources would be required to permit this inventory. Thus, both the recommendations of the subcommittee and the task force implied that land use planning was a fundamental aspect of the national park reserve concept.

The full Advisory Board reviewed the subcommittee's study in light of the task force analytic report and recommended that action be deferred on the national parks reserve concept. Their reasoning was that legislation pending before Congress would add both land use planning and mined land reclamation on a national scale, which would accomplish much of what the reserve concept would do for a limited area. The Board felt that deferral would provide an opportunity to analyze the effectiveness of these bills in achieving wise land use once they became law.