

Advisory Board Ad Hoc Committee

Report on

"National Parks for the Future"

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INTRODUCTION

The most searching and comprehensive examination of the National Park Service in its hundred year history was carried out by the Conservation Foundation as the result of a \$170,000 contract from the Park Service. The resulting study, entitled "National Parks for the Future", was not intended to tell the Service what a good job it was doing, but rather to look deeply into all of its aspects and produce the most constructively critical report it could. The fact that the Conservation Foundation, and not the National Rifle Association, was chosen to carry out the study obviously built in certain prejudices. Nevertheless, the Foundation by setting up a series of task forces, composed of individuals representing a broad spectrum of our society, including students, industrialists, labor leaders and scientists, tried to avail itself of as many opinions and as much expertise as possible. The resulting report is an excellent one. But while comprehensive, it should not be thought of as consistent. The bulk of the publication is composed of reports prepared by the consultant groups. These are preceded by the overall recommendations of the Foundation, which represent both its own prejudices and some, but not all, of the conclusions of the task forces. Viewed as a whole, the report represents a healthy diversity of thought that accomplished the Service's objectives in commissioning the study.

The report deserves careful examination at all levels of the Service, for it is filled with stimulating ideas, although some are premature or impractical.

The task assigned this ad hoc committee was to critically analyze the total publication and report its reactions to the Advisory Board. Obviously if we were to react to each idea our report would be voluminous, unweildy and ineffective. Furthermore, many of the recommendations had already been put into practice; many current programs, if expanded, would fulfill other suggestions; and, many significant ideas could be implemented within existing authority at the discretion of the Director.

Therefore, this committee report is organized into two parts. First, four recommendations stimulated by various parts of the report have been suggested for immediate consideration and action.

Second, five problem themes which appeared to cross-cut many of the reports and relate both to major and minor issues are discussed in terms of specific suggested courses for action.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

The following items are recommended for immediate consideration:

Additional Parks Near Urban Centers

An administrative task force should be established immediately to prepare an inventory and evaluation of sizable natural areas within striking distance of large cities for additions to the National Park System. It is suggested that this task force be instructed to report no later than the end of 1974, so that its findings can be acted upon in 1976 -- the U. S. Bicentennial year. (p. 20) This group should also explore means of financing additions to the Park System. (pgs. 23, 74, 135, 212)

Automobiles and Public Transportation

"Automobiles can destroy our National Park heritage just as surely as they have made our cities inhumane and dangerous to life and lung and have desecrated much of the metropolitan countryside." Therefore, a special commission should be appointed to study the entire question of private automobiles in the parks and alternative methods of intra-park transportation. (p. 16)

Concurrently, the National Park Service (in cooperation with the Department of Transportation) should be provided authority and funds to plan and undertake several demonstration projects toward the establishment of a coordinated system of public transportation, giving access to the parks from urban areas. (pgs 13, 85)

Camping

Considering the multitude of specific issues surrounding the use of the parks for camping, the National Park Service should develop a comprehensive camping policy.

There are several suggestions throughout the report pertaining to camping ranging from the experimental primitive area camps to limitation of in-park campgrounds, camping only in tents with tent and equipment rental facilities available and including the exclusion of all modern homes on wheels. (pgs 13, 22, 34, 37, 200, 205, 209) All of these must be weighed and evaluated against the most effective use of park areas.

Carrying Capacity Research

Each park has a limited capacity of visitation and park values can be quickly eroded by overuse. Research on means for arriving at a total carrying capacity assessment involving physical, ecological and psychological elements should be undertaken now, then a determination made of the carrying capacity for every unit under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. A program for implementing a policy of visitor limitation based upon the arrived at carrying capacity of each specific park should then be implemented. High priority in research funding must be given this task. (pgs. 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 15, 17, 18, 36, 37, 38, 53, 61, 102, 126, 127, 150, 153, 163, 167, 168, 207, 245.)

EXPANSION

New Areas

The National Park System should continue to be expanded by offering protection to outstanding scenic and recreational resources, sites of historic importance, natural resource parks, islands, marine and estuarine

resources, etc. In connection with urban needs, as mentioned elsewhere, we concur with the establishment of a task force to inventory and evaluate sizable natural areas near large cities for addition to the National Park System. (p. 20) The concept of reserving modified (strip mined, etc.) land for possible future park areas should be pursued. (p. 91) Given the fact that its cost is not likely to be as cheap as was once thought, this approach should certainly have second priority over existing available natural lands.

Alaska

Within Alaska, those areas that meet park criteria, that border on the unique and are not represented by similar biomes and ecosystems with the National Park System, should be acquired.

Current National Park Service policy precludes recreational hunting in National Parks and Monuments. This limitation should be upheld within the new Alaskan parks. However, it must be recognized that in Alaska, segments of land to be incorporated in the National Park System will represent historic sources of sustenance for indigenous populations. Here hunting and the gathering of food will have to be allowed initially on reduced basis, then phased out over a period of years as other subsistence techniques are developed. (p. 19)

In-holdings

The National Park Service should prepare an up-to-date status report on in-holdings and a recommended program for acquisition. (p. 104)

URBAN RAMIFICATIONS

We have already suggested that immediate action is desirable on the establishment of an administrative task force to prepare an inventory and evaluation of sizable natural areas within striking distance of large

cities, for addition to the National Park System. (p. 20)

This recommendation would help the National Parks to be kept as pure, or more pure, than they have ever been. The Parks can be hedged on one side with inviolable wilderness areas, and on the other with big scale, massive recreation areas such as the Gateways. For true participation in total outdoor recreational experiences for all citizenry, it is suggested that the type of planning proposed under the California four-year moratorium on all building activities along the one thousand miles of coast line with no exceptions, be looked to as an approach to this long range planning for the best future use of our recreational resources.

The east and the west Gateways in themselves are enormous steps in the right direction. They can and will act as natural buffer areas, joined with new parks in Alaska, to create areas where the American citizen, anxious to enjoy recreation in a perfect setting, can do so without impinging upon the natural qualities of most of the great National Parks.

RESEARCH

Funding Level

Research funding for the National Park Service should be raised to not less than 10% of its operating budget. The Forest Service ecological research funds in fiscal year 1972 were 11% of its operating budget, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife 19%, while the National Park Service funding for natural science research has only been seven-tenths of one per cent. (p. 93)

The National Park Service should embark upon a critically important funding and information stage for research in the next one to three years. For a decade and a half following that time, heavy investment should be made to create an information base strong enough to support effective management and interpretation of the park system. (p. 97)

Top Level Coordinator

The National Park Service's research effort, seen in totality, including all studies in the natural and social sciences, calls for a strong Chief Scientist position equivalent in rank to that of an Assistant Director. Accountability for the research program as a whole and for the gains and losses must be placed in this office. With the recommended increase in funding, guidance of contract scientists and scientists on the National Park Service staff will require the kind of direction, level and degree of supervision unprecedented to now. This upgrading of research administration will require immediate increased funding at the Washington office level even before the major fund increase becomes available for the overall Park Service research effort.

Basic and Applied Research

Too often all research is seen as of an applied nature, studies born of crisis and designed to solve management and preservation problems. Desperately needed in the Park Service, however, is a reservoir of data which can be drawn upon to supply base line information. (pgs. 40, 100)

Several examples of subjects needing research are cited in the report with which we concur:

The need for more social science research should be especially stressed so that the habits, attitudes and desires of visitors and potential visitors can be better understood. The needs, expectations and limitations of urban

residents should be determined, and special research should be undertaken to determine attitudes and expectations among non-park-using socioeconomic groups. (pgs. 8, 12, 13, 17, 18, 70, 211, 240, 244)

As already noted, high priority should be given to research directed at finding the physical, ecological and psychological carrying capacity of every unit under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service. (pgs. 36, 18)

Cover-type maps of all wilderness parks and monuments, ecosystem studies of the principal plant-animal communities of the several park units, life history studies of the leading animal species identifying their roles in the ecosystems, special studies of the ecology of rare species, and studies of various administrative and planning programs are a few additional examples of potential research subjects. (pgs. 41, 42)

Coordination of In-house and Contract Research

The most efficient combination of in-house and contract research has always been a Park Service problem and reemphasizes the need for a top level research coordinator. One section of the report proposes a series of National Park Service Research Units on university campuses, to be staffed initially to solve specific problems. This committee feels, however, that these expensive units may not be the most efficient way to meet changing research needs and obtaining the benefits of new research skills. The flexibility of contract research may in many cases make better use of existing research funds. Furthermore, these "Research Units" could easily become a rather inefficient means of federal subsidy for educational institutions.

National Archaeological and Historical Policy

Appropriate mechanisms for effectively carrying out the national archaeological and historic policy do not exist. The National Park Service

by an accumulation of assignments from the Congress, and recently reinforced by Executive Order 11593, has broadened the responsibilities of the National Park Service far beyond the boundaries of the parks. The Service has been assigned certain responsibilities over the country's major archaeological and historic treasures outside the park areas and resulting in a multitude of programs which have greatly overburdened it and interfered with its original mission. It is becoming clear that the Service has neither the personnel nor the resources to perform this accelerating obligation in a manner commensurate with its responsibilities or consistent with its tradition of quality. The American public and its political leaders must reject the notion that the parks can be all things to all people, and in particular, they must reject any suggestion that the National Park System has a responsibility to engage in programs which cover the entire spectrum of outdoor, historic, and cultural needs of the American people.

It is therefore recommended that a critical examination be made of the multitude of federal responsibilities in archaeology and history outside National Park areas to determine how these can be handled in a manner that will not deter the Service from its original mission, but will still allow the development and preservation of these cultural treasures.

ADMINISTRATION

Advisory Groups

The recommendation that an advisory group be established for each field unit of the National Park System is not practical. Although we feel the idea of national advisory boards is an excellent one, we are concerned that a cumbersome organizational structure might result for additions below this level. (pgs. 8, 27, 49, 52, 69, 81, 200, 244)

The value of a scientific advisory committee for specific parks is recognized as useful if it is seen as needed by the Chief Scientist of the National Park Service or the individual park superintendent.

Classification of Areas and Reorganization

We concur with the President's proposal for a Department of Natural Resources. (p. 81) However, it should be pointed out that the creation of such a Department with its diverse interests should not be allowed to dilute the strength of the National Park Service.

We are of the opinion that proposed "metropolitan-periphery" parks should fall within the recreation sector of the National Park System and be planned for and operated by the National Park System. If we divorce recreation from the National Park System the national parks will starve to death.

(pgs. 80, 107)

The various recommendations pertaining to consolidation and names of Bureaus, restructuring the classification of areas, transfer the areas, and addition of areas in or near urban sites deserves a special review. (pgs. 11, 15, 16, 34, 49, 66, 68, 79, 91)

Protection of Historical, Archaeological, and Natural Areas

Further protection is needed for both cultural and natural resources outside park boundaries. To accomplish this, two recommendations are made. Stronger legal and administrative sanctions should be added to the Historic Sites Act to permit the administering authority to protect archaeological and historical sites on the National Register from destruction and for possible future inclusion in the National Park System. (p. 45)

Financial as well as technical assistance should be provided to the states by the federal government for establishment and administration of a system of natural areas to be managed primarily for research and education.

This could be a companion program to that authorized in 1966 by the National Historic Preservation Act, since no parallel program exists for protection of natural areas for educational and scientific purposes. (p. 110)

PLANNING

National Land-use Plan

A national land-use planning program and a well-administrated National Land Use Policy Act are both essential in order for park needs to be evaluated in relation to other national priorities and to protect park settings. P. 87)

Regional Planning

Regional planning encompassing national parks and park-influence zones should be undertaken under federal leadership in cooperation with state and local governments. Such regional planning projects should be authorized by Congress and be conducted by the Secretary of the Interior in cooperation with other affected federal agencies. (p. 86)

Master Park Planning

In the master plan process, the management of the various park lands should be seen as conforming to their dominant values. Each park unit should be examined and planned according to its own values and carrying capacities. It is especially important, with respect to park accommodations, that specific decisions concerning type, scale, numbers and location of facilities must be left to the master planning process, while at the same time reflecting policy decision regarding carrying capacity.

SUMMARY COMMENTS

This has been a challenging assignment, providing a fascinating overview of National Park Service operations, policies, problems and needs. There is

no doubt that the reports of the task forces and the Conservation Foundation report were eminently constructive in forcing a review of the National Park Service's future. While several of their recommendations could not be fully accepted, that does not lessen their value in stimulating a much needed reevaluation of priorities.

Our reaction to their report obviously reflects the main problem of the Park Service as well as our society, the rapid growth of this country's population. This is reflected in our concerns for: additions to the Park System, transportation needs, the amount of visitation individual parks can stand, the expanding type of needs to be served, the necessity for research to understand how to provide the best use of the parks and the planning required to allow these objectives to be accomplished.

Our overriding concern has been that the National Park Service retain its tradition of high quality and the level of public service which has characterized it for a century. The recommendations in this report are directed to that goal.