

Statement of John A. Carver, Jr., Assistant Secretary of the Interior, Public Land Management, before the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, February 7, 1963. (Briefing sessions on Public Land Management Bureaus - National Park Service.)

National Park Service

At a luncheon the other day with the president of one of the largest and most influential of what I call the non-commercial conservation organizations, I said that I could identify several examples of bureau programs which could successfully defy the efforts of the most determined Secretarial officer to change. More than one of these is in the parks field; the one I chose to illustrate my point was the matter of hunting in national parks.

Many people think that the dwindling hunting opportunities in this country ought to be augmented by regulated public hunting in national park areas. It is my judgment that even if a Secretary of the Interior should come to this view, he could not successfully implement it.

I mention this, not to stir controversy but merely to point out that in the parks, more than in any other area of this Department's activities, the people have taken a direct hand in policy making.

Parks are our most national activity; in many ways they are the most satisfying responsibilities we have.

My own restless probings have disclosed that they can be just as uncomfortable as lands or Indians. My baptism was in June 1961, when I gave the dedicatory address for the Tioga Pass Road, which the Sierra Club, among others, had vigorously opposed, and which Secretary Udall had characterized as an "egregious error" in a national magazine the month before.

As in the case of the Bureau of Land Management section of this statement, I want to mention two or three areas where I've personally taken a hand, before turning the responsibility over to the distinguished, able, and agile Director, Conrad L. Wirth.

a. Concessions Management

The first problem I worked on in the Department was concessions management. Concessions contracts for two years were backed up and stalled in my office when I came to it, and I was deep into the subject before I was even on the payroll, the Senate having not yet confirmed me.

A study of concessions management operations and policy by the House Appropriations Committee (with the knowledge and concurrence of this committee) will present extensive data on our experience in trying to accomplish the governmental objective of furnishing services in national parks through concessioners. At a meeting with the concessioners last fall, I outlined my own conclusions: that utilization of private enterprise to furnish needed facilities in national parks on a regulated basis seemed to me a sound policy which had achieved a measure of legislative sanction; that government in these circumstances owed it to the concessioners to understand and accommodate, as far as practicable, the incidents of private enterprise operations, principally those necessary to amortize debt-financed capital investments requested by the Government; that low franchise fees were causing criticism of concession operations, a matter which the concessioners themselves ought to look to; that although difficult to regulate, the so-called non-profit distributing companies which combine profitable with unprofitable operations at different parks would not be disturbed unless or until Congress told us to; and that certain archaic practices, principally having to do with transportation monopolies ought to be carefully re-examined by both the concessioners and the government as contracts come up for renewal.

b. National Capital Region

When it comes to Park Service matters in the District of Columbia, everybody gets into the act. This is understandable. One of the most dedicated public servants I know is Sutton Jett, whose title as Regional Director doesn't begin to describe the special responsibilities he has.

The Park Police is a unique force. The White House was recently made a National Monument. Mr. Jett worries about as many echelons of superiors as any man in Washington. He is on the same telephone exchange as the Assistant Secretary, the Under Secretary, and the Secretary, and on a tie-line to the Capitol and many people know his number.

I think we have been able to reduce some of our headaches in Washington matters by adhering a little more firmly to the basic truth that the ultimate decision on most of the raging controversies hereabouts rests with the Congress. But the Department is asked for recommendations on every question which involves conflict with existing park areas, Three Sisters Bridge, Glover-Archbold Park, the Inner Loop, and a score of highway proposals involve park lands. The National Capital Planning Commission, the Regional Planning Council, the planning bodies of Arlington, Fairfax, Montgomery and other metropolitan counties, the District Commissioners, the Bureau of Public Roads, the National Capital Transportation Agency, the Fine Arts Commission, and many others, consult with Park Service and Department officials.

Most of these matters come under different committee jurisdiction, but the individual members of Congress, many of whom drive to and from the Capitol over Park Service parkways take an interest.

I would like to call particular attention to the Rock Creek Nature Center, and planetarium, of which we are very proud. I know Director Wirth wants each of the members, and particularly the new members, to bring their families out to see these facilities on a special occasion.

c. New parks and recreation areas

A special section of this report is devoted to the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, and its role in the coordination of federal activity and the devising of standards and criteria for new areas. Under the Park Service heading, however, should be a special mention of the continuing work of the National Parks Advisory Board as a non-governmental body of dedicated citizens who really work in reviewing and sifting the various proposals which are made for additions to the National Park System. Advice from the Board is very helpful in making reports on park proposals submitted to Congress and transmitted to the Department for comment.

d. Wildlife Management

I've referred to the controversy over hunting in parks. I should add that Secretary Udall last April appointed a special Wildlife Advisory Committee to review existing wildlife programs, and to make recommendations. These are anticipated next month.