
For almost twenty years, I guess, I've been a confirmed fan of the League of Women Voters. My wife's membership has engaged me, from time to time, in workshop sessions like this; and my own political activities have disengaged her, so to speak and from time to time, from League office-holding, in conformance with your strict rule about partisanship, even by marriage.

In that time, I've learned that a League meeting is no place to be superficial; that the members will have done their homework, will have the facts, and be capable of using them. So I come before you to talk about the Potomac with trepidation. The Corps of Engineers' study report is sure to have been read and digested; the divergent views represented on the panel which preceded me this morning will have been noted; it can be anticipated that exhortation or rhetoric will move you not at all.

I'm going to talk today to only one aspect of the question of the proper development of the Potomac -- the question of impact on park and natural values.

Quite promptly after I joined the Department, I was visited by some representatives of one of the groups with whom I had worked while on the staff of a United States Senator. We had worked on various public questions of mutual interest in my native state, and had in the past seen eye-to-eye on things like the importance of multiple-purpose river development, on a regional or basin approach, on yardstick utility rates. In essence, the request they brought to me in my new capacity as a supervisor of the National Park Service was to raise the level of consideration of the development of the Potomac above the park considerations, to free the department for a broader, public interest judgment -- one that would give effect to the need for pure water to drink, for flood control and power development, for stream flow regulation.

They had a right to expect me to be sympathetic, for these were articles of faith, principles to which I had sworn fealty on other battlegrounds.

I've had occasion many times since, as I did that day, to contemplate the illusory nature of high sounding conservation slogans in the resolution of actual conservation conflicts. Two weeks ago today I devoted a whole speech to the subject, which I called Conservation and Politics, of the growing complexity of the conservation movement. I spoke of the manipulation of policy formulation by ad hominem associations, by epithet, of the conditioned reaction to verbal stimuli which are a part of our political tradition.
Let me quote a little:

'Take the word 'exploit' in reference to economic development needs. This is ordinarily a bad word in the conservation lexicon -- not for any etymological or philological reason, for words are neutral. But this one exudes the colorful symbolism of our political environment. 'Exploit' means 'spoil'; 'conserve' means 'save'. In this context, one doesn't even need to write down the moral propositions that create the differences. Generations of holy crusade have produced the glandular reaction -- 'exploiter', evil; 'conservationist', virtuous.

'This Pavlovian reference illustrates how deeply conservation issues have cut into national thinking. Some will say: 'Isn't this good? Shouldn't people react righteously without having to ponder? Let's not equivocate with evil!' This begs the question, for it assumes that the labels and catch-phrases, the campaign slogans, have been correctly assigned: that there is some divine guidance, some intuitive gift, that permits ready identification of an infidel or heathen cause. For the purist, there are no gradations of virtue -- no compromises between ideal and reality.

'A few days ago an experienced and seemingly sophisticated government servant said to me, 'Why doesn't the Department create a special board for the sole purpose of identifying the public interest?'

'A good question. Yet in the three years and almost a half I've been in the Department, I can't recall any one of the innumerable controversies where each side of the issue wasn't framed plausibly in terms of the public interest. I've known no decision made by Secretary Udall which hasn't been made in the public interest. Yet the controversies have been deep and vigorous, and many have reverberated in the halls of Congress or the columns of the press long after they were made. In all of them both sides of the controversy are stated in terms of the public interest, and in most of them both sides are in the public interest. But choices have to be made and the job of making choices cannot be delegated by the Secretary to a Board.

'Let's look at a couple of specific cases. The development plan for the Potomac presents one controversy now active. The development of the Colorado another. Those who would build dams (in one case the dam builders are in another Department, in the other case in our own), and those who oppose in favor of the existing values, such as parks or private improvements, each state a public interest case.

'Electric energy for a rapidly growing population and burgeoning economy must be planned for. Both sides agree, but opponents of the dam assert that account has not been taken of alternatives like nuclear power.

'Recreation opportunities are laudable side benefits of dams -- but does this kind of recreation outweigh the damage to natural features?
Listen to the language of the two sides:

From the dam builders:

Water-based outdoor recreation is one of the most popular leisure-time activities in the Pacific Southwest region. The capacity of many existing recreation facilities is already strained. Coincident with the anticipated population growth of the region will be an increased demand for water-oriented outdoor recreation uses. Thus, new basic facilities are included in the plan of development wherever appropriate.

The basic facilities that would be provided at the reservoirs include access roads, parking areas, beaches, boat launching ramps, picnic and campground areas, public utilities, comfort stations, and related items. The new reservoirs would create new large water areas for boating, fishing, swimming, and water skiing and, additionally, would provide new access to some of the most spectacular scenery in the Nation.

From the opponents:

The construction of a reservoir in this reach of the Canyon (at Bridge) would inevitably result in the loss of park values of national significance.

The river, with its ever changing currents, pools and rapids, would be blotted out by the slack water of the reservoir.

The existing natural streambank ecology would be drastically changed throughout the extent of the reservoir. The existing plant and animal habitats would be drowned out, and colonization by exotic species would be expected. In the uppermost regions of the reservoir, silt deposition and debris accumulation would be inevitable.

The most obvious change in the recreational use would be the limitation of the traditional and exhilarating experience of wild river boating.

Controversies like these are incapable of resolution by the application of rhetoric or slogan -- something far more fundamental is expected of government than that.

And something far more fundamental ought to be expected of the public."

I spoke also of Hetch Hetchy as the early warning of what is today a truism--that one conservationist's ideal could be another's desecration, that the recriminations among friends under stress match those that draw blood from sworn enemies.

Hetch Hetchy became a national issue primarily because of its public power aspects, but the contention between conservation values was also very much in the public eye. Labels became mixed and the identity of friend and foe became complicated. If you can conceive of it, John Muir was actually cast
in the role of advocate for Pacific Gas and Electric Company, was called a mouthpiece of 'the interests'. To those who recount this story from the public power viewpoint, the term 'conservationist' is reserved for Hetch Hetchy's proponents -- all others fall in the category of 'nature lovers' or 'power interests'. In this, the first clear instance of conflict among national conservation objectives, the charge was also made by one element of the conservation front that their erstwhile friends were being exploited by those having diametrically opposite social values. 'Save Yosemite from Destruction' was a rallying cry among dedicated conservationists; it was equally available to those who would use every possible device to defeat the reservation of any further lands for park purposes.'

I predicted that "the issues upon which the conservation community finds itself divided will increase as demands for scarce land increase. The political dimension of conservation has expanded in ever-widening circles as our society and our technology have become increasingly complex. The simple 'for' or 'against' issue of 1900 now has overtones of the bureaucratic contest for policy supremacy. 'Multiple use' becomes a slogan to block the preservation of critically needed recreation values; freedom to locate mineral claims argues against inclusion of a public domain tract in either a forest or a park. Parks supporters are accused of 'locking up' resources because they regard hunting incompatible with park objectives. The pluralism of modern life makes extremely complicated the simple faith which motivated Thoreau, Muir, Powell and the other prophets of the good life.'"

I do not need to restate for you the precise application of this question in the Potomac, and particularly on the matter of the proposal to build a dam at Seneca which will flood a segment of the C&O Canal.

The Chief of Engineers has stated well enough that this is a touchy issue, recommending "further studies of the Potomac estuary prior to the construction stage for the Seneca project".

'The Board notes the highly complex nature of the Potomac estuary, the shortage of basic data concerning it, and the high cost of the proposed improvement of conditions therein. It finds that the conversion of saline water or advanced waste treatment systems, including distillation of sewage effluent to potable water, are not now feasible alternatives to meet the water supply and quality needs for the Washington Metropolitan area or other parts of the basin. The Board recognizes that prior to construction of the Seneca project, extensive study of the estuary would be made to provide a better understanding of the numerous variables involved, and that the then existing state of development of probable alternative means of accomplishing all objectives of the plan in meeting the water-related needs of the Washington Metropolitan area would be reviewed."
But some of the proponents of the Seneca dam have been less judicious in the statement of their case, and with your indulgence I'd like to comment on some of the arguments made — not simply because they've been made with reference to the Potomac, but because they come up in one form or another in every controversy of this kind.

Let's start with the economics of recreation. There is no question but that the purest of the park purists will indulge in this particular numbers game when it suits their purposes. Generally it suits their purposes when new park areas are opposed on the ground that the land to be taken will be removed from the tax rolls. Then we trot out the statistics of recreation as a contributor to the local economy. Chambers of Commerces are divided and bank boards of directors are split, torn between the clamor of the motel owners on the one hand and the cattlemen on the other.

This game has reached its highest (or lowest) form in the argument about the economics of water based recreation on the water impoundment of Seneca, in a report on the Potential Economic Significance for Maryland of River Bend (substantially equivalent to Seneca), printed by the Maryland Department of Economic Development.

"Effect of River Bend: We grant at the outset that the development of the River Bend project will cause an impairment of the Canal. But we question whether it will destroy it. All available information shows that roughly 40 miles of the Canal would be inundated and destroyed if River Bend is built. This is less than one-fourth the total length of the Canal, 22 percent to be precise. If this 22 percent is lost to the State of Maryland, how great will be the economic loss?

"It is reported that the bulk of visitors to the C&O Canal visit the section below the point where the River Bend dam would be constructed, but perhaps this cannot be proved. Instead, let us make the extreme assumption that all of the visitors to the Canal visit only that area between the point where the dam would be built and the area below Harper's Ferry, the northernmost point of the lake that would be created at River Bend. If that were so, then Maryland would lose about $2.9 million in expenditures by visitors using the Canal. And this is the assumption we have used throughout this report.

"The point here is that even under extreme assumptions, Maryland would, at present, lose no more than $2.9 million if a part of the Canal were inundated, and it would gain about $232 million, a ratio of better than 70 to 1.

"The point has been made, and with justification, that unspoiled or natural areas in this country are diminishing and should be preserved. There are other factors, including such items as bird sanctuaries, and these all should be given due weight. But along with these factors that need considering is
the benefit to the people who could use River Bend. How do these numbers of people (in terms of days of usage) stack up against the use by the people of the C&O Canal? The section of this report dealing with the 'Recreation Market' shows that some 32 million recreation days could be developed at River Bend, with about half of this number being spent on the Maryland side. (And we regard this as a conservative estimate.) In other words, if we compare 586,500 days on the Canal with 32 million days at River Bend, the latter would very probably be used 40 times more than the C&O Canal.

"One factor to be considered is that if the Canal were properly developed, by 1970, for example, even more people would use it. But this also applies to River Bend, where we have made no allowance for a market that would be growing because of population increases.

"If we consider the economic benefits to the State of Maryland, and to both Montgomery and Frederick counties from a proper development of the tourism-recreation potentials at River Bend, there can be no serious argument against the proposed project. As we see it, the question is this: how can River Bend be properly developed and at the same time preserve the maximum amount of the C&O Canal and increase its usage by the people? Considering that less than 25 percent of the Canal would be lost, it should be possible to find a compromise here, particularly in view of the benefits that would go to Maryland in terms of increased business, increased income, and increased tax revenues -- plus the availability of a really first-class water facility that would be used by many more people than would use the C&O Canal."

Other sections of the report show how this $200 plus million figure was arrived at. It is important to note, however, that these data were not adopted by the Corps of Engineers, who used only half of the cited 32 million recreation days as their maximum figure for the whole Potomac development.

The Report's figures compute out to a recreation impoundment of 80,000 average visitor load for each of 200 days season. This average figure is just shy of the maximum figure for Jones Beach, cited by ORRRC as the ultimate in heavy urban use; the Park Service estimates it requires building for more than two hundred thousand peak capacity. The Maryland-financed Report calls for a pillow capacity (word of art for number of sleeping spaces) more than that for the entire national park system.

The point is not whether the figures are accurate, but the aptness of the argument at all.

Federal Hall is a rather beat-up old building in the financial district of New York. It doesn't get much visitation, although work being done for the lower Manhattan historic sites generally is generating a lot of new interest.
I inquired what the United States might get if we sold this tiny piece of land on the open market. I was told that a conservative estimate was $7,500,000. To justify $7,500,000 for the land, quite a building would have to be built, and the tax rolls would net a substantial sum.

Is this an argument for selling it?

Or we could sell Independence Hall for $13,000,000, a price which would surely dictate bulldozing down the cradle of our liberty in favor of an economically more viable development -- maybe a parking lot.

Could we get along with 22 percent less of the land, timber, and other material resources of Yellowstone? Maybe power sites in Yosemite could be justified on a cost-benefit scale? Probably more people would use the water behind the dams than now visit the Park anyway!

In Morris Cooke's monumental study, Ten Rivers in America's Future, conflicts between plans for storage reservoirs and the interests of local groups in preventing land inundation were called "apparent conflicts".

I think they are real, not apparent. I doubt that the wisdom of man is going to divine a measuring rod with a dollar sign attached to help us make the choice.

Rather the choice is going to have to be in the terms framed by Secretary Udall, who has called the Potomac the "people's river".

The beauty of the Potomac River and its environment was responsible for the selection of the area as a national capital. Preservation of the natural character of the Washington segment of the River seems to us to be worthy of extraordinary effort.

This would mean, I would hope, something better than promising a restudy of alternatives before actually beginning construction. It should mean a willingness on the part of even the most partisan proponents to forbear the application of the kind of statistics so freely thrown around about the economic benefits of recreation as opposed to the destruction of natural values sometimes loosely categorized as a specialized kind of recreation.

This Department is a veteran of both sides of the fight -- I'm not being any harsher here than I am with those within our own Department who argue that a reservoir into Grand Canyon should be looked upon as a benefit, a great new water access to hitherto inaccessible areas of the park.

Materialist considerations can serve the aesthetic cause. I was struck, in an examination of the McMillan Commission Report of more than sixty years ago -- the report which as much as L'Enfant himself set the architectural and monumental tone of our city -- as the reason given for deciding not to fill in the lower Rock Creek gorge, and pave its surface:
"If the government is not to go heavily into real estate speculation in competition with the landowners of the District, the cost of the culvert project becomes so enormous as to be utterly out of the question".

Speaking of the C&O Canal, that same commission recommended that "no change should come to pass in the character of the canal that will tend to transform its primitive character and quaint beauty".

It is one of the heartening aspects of the decade of the Sixties, and of the leadership of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, that there is concern for our heritage of history and natural beauty, for open space and wilderness as well as highways and "recreation".

These things have a price, but our affluent nation will pay a price.

It is the policy of the administration "to seek to reserve for the benefit of the National Capital Region strategic open spaces, including existing park, woodland and scenic resources." This statement of course doesn't decide or end the argument; but it should establish that we won't sacrifice these values for a cost-benefit percentage point alone.