

STATE PARK PHILOSOPHY

Excerpts from remarks of Newton B. Drury, Chief, Division of Beaches and Parks, California, given at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference on State Parks, Itasca State Park, Minnesota, September 20, 1957.

There is a state park philosophy in the sense of a set of guiding principles for what we consider an important human institution. Otherwise we would not be here today.

The "philosophy" if you will -- of the work in which... (state park people)...are engaged, this unique phase of land and resource management, I think, is distinguished in this: that while other lands are administered to conserve their resources to serve man's material needs, park lands are managed to minister to the human mind and spirit. They are set aside to preserve their beauty, reveal their meaning, and maintain their integrity. They involve a trusteeship on the part of the present, to use the words of Carlyle, "toward the past and generations yet unborn."

That this purpose is hard to define is patent. This is true of all matters of the spirit. No one has fully expressed in simple terms the purpose of a great institution like a university or a religion. Yet those engaged in the park movement feel this purpose even when they do not put it in words, and their whole endeavor, whether they realize it or not, is shaped and guided by it.

Let us consider some of the principles that by common consent have evolved and by most are accepted as to state parks, in their establishment, development, management and interpretation.

One of these, and it is in my opinion basic, is that state parks have as a dominant purpose the **preservation**, insofar as feasible, **of the qualities of native landscape**. It was the wonders of nature, as revealed to the explorers and pioneers, that in places like Yellowstone and Yosemite first led to the conviction that here were lands too fine to have their beauty or their interest cheapened or destroyed by turning them to base uses for the advantage of the few or of the moment. "This place should be preserved for us and others after us to enjoy as we have enjoyed it." This was the thought in the minds of park pioneers over a century ago, and it is the thought behind the growing public demand for parks at all levels of government.

We are concerning ourselves here with **State** parks. Obviously, there are some lands of such distinction that their preservation is the concern of the nation as a whole. This is exemplified in our great National Park System. Most of its units are recognized as being beyond the responsibilities of the states in which they happen to be located. In many cases--and I think offhand of Great Smokies, Mammoth Cave, Carlsbad and Yosemite--the states have taken the initiative and then passed on the responsibility to the nation for varied reasons: financial inability, desire for prestige,

or to obtain the fruits of increased travel. But mainly because of recognition of national significance and the importance of national parks. True, local promotions have resulted in some areas of less than national caliber being forced upon the National Park System, but even this is a tribute to the prestige of National Parks. Doubtless every extensive portfolio of investments contains some "cats and dogs".

When we come to the state park category this is likewise true. Parks, like gold, are where you find them. But as funds for state parks increase, there is a tendency to strive for the diversion of appropriations to projects not justified by their importance to the entire state. Even California has not been immune from this, and only a year ago it was found desirable for our Commission to restate its criteria as to statewide significance. In the main it has been possible to hold to the principle that "state park funds are not intended to be used as a subsidy to local recreation".

This is not to say that there should be as far as possible a fair geographical distribution of areas, and a fair proportion among different types. This has been reasonably well accomplished in the California State Park System and will be even more so when the 40 million dollar appropriation already made for new areas and rounding out existing parks has been expended under the Five Year Master Plan.

The additions to round out the 145 present units of the system are to us even more important than the 40 to 50 new areas provided for. The ideal is to have unified and complete areas, preferably entire watersheds where attainable. Inholdings, with the adverse uses that are the bane of the park administrator, will, we hope, be largely eliminated. This ideal is never completely realized, but it surely is a part of the park philosophy. As to types of areas, the system when the five year program is completed will roughly be apportioned as follows: Natural and Scenic Areas, 35 per cent; Historical Areas, 15 per cent; Recreational Areas, 50 per cent. Needless to say, effort has been made to give highest priorities to the best examples of each type.

State Park Development

Let us turn to the subject of development. This is the critical phase, as many a fine area has suffered from ill-considered, inappropriate modification of its original qualities in hasty development for public use. A well thought out Master Plan of Development should precede construction, based upon the principle that each area should be developed to serve its highest use.

Restraint should be the watchword in development. The burden of proof should rest upon those who propose modification of natural conditions.

There is the constant problem of balancing the preservation of natural conditions with the provision of facilities for public use in keeping with the highest values. Obviously parks are intended for human enjoyment, but there is always the danger of development which will promote over-use, of passing the point of diminishing returns, so that the satisfactions sought by many are lost to all because of excess in development and use. The fact that a

park is popular is no good reason for developing it beyond its carrying capacity. Many a great landscape carries in its beauty the seeds of its own destruction.

This has been the subject of much earnest thought and careful planning in Yosemite, for example, and it is surely the case in the Redwoods and other state and national parks.

Needless to say a natural reserve like Point Lobos, with its rugged seacoast crowned with wind-blown Monterey Cypress, its wealth of flora and fauna, its clamoring sea lions on the offshore rocks, its rare sea otters and its birds of shore and sea, would be developed primarily as a great natural exhibit. It would be used with more restraint than would the recreational beaches of the south or the recreational areas on the shores of reservoirs, as at our recent developments on Folsom Lake. But even in these so-called recreational areas it is, I hope, an element of the state park philosophy that emphasis should be upon preservation of natural environment, and the harmonizing of necessary developments therewith. Our planners, engineers, and landscape architects, considering the limitations imposed by relentlessly mounting public use, have worked skillfully toward this end.

It follows, since state parks are primarily natural areas, that "developments are for the purpose of making the areas available for public enjoyment in a manner consistent with the preservation of landscape quality and should be of the simpler sorts in a natural environment (i.e. camping, picnicking, sightseeing, nature study, hiking, riding, boating, swimming, fishing, etc.) involving no major modification of their lands, forests and waters, and without extensive introduction of artificial features such as athletic fields, playgrounds, golf courses, and other forms of recreational developments that primarily are for local benefit."

This is quoted from our recently-issued criteria for state parks in California, and while it may be challenged in some quarters it has been, up to now, the pattern followed in our neck of the woods.

In state, no less than in national parks, we should always be alive to our obligation, before it is too late, to set aside, in reasonable proportion, outstanding representative areas of forest, seacoast, desert, mountains, lakeshore, rivers and marshland as outdoor laboratories for nature interpretation, scientific and aesthetic study. This is the basis of our naturalist program. If we succeed, these will be a heritage for which future generations will be increasingly grateful, as in the not too distant future they will in all probability be the only places where forests evolve naturally, plants and animals live in harmonious relationship with themselves and their environment and nature and her works can still be studied in the original design.

Regardless of the principal purpose of any state park area, we are conscious that we are primarily managers of lands and are always in the landscape business. This is primarily true, of course, of scenic areas. But it is also true of recreational parks; and it is true of "history written on the land," in those areas like the Gold Discovery Site and La Purisima Mission. There have developed many types of state parks, depending on local conditions and public demand. But with respect to all of them we are charged

with maintaining the integrity of native landscape insofar as it is humanly possible.

Everywhere the relentless march of material progress, of urbanization, industrialization and consumption of resources for commercial ends are making their impact on the native landscape. Everywhere they are rubbing the bloom off the land. Except in the parks and even there we know that we are fighting what sometimes seems to be a losing battle. Except in the parks—and in some areas with a partially related purpose, such as the National Forests—the qualities of great open spaces that we took for granted a generation ago are rapidly disappearing. We all know the reason. In California, for instance, population is increasing at the rate of a million every three years. We are destined—or condemned—to have 25 million people by 1975. We have 14 million now, and undoubtedly the great upsurge in our park program is in response to the recreational needs of these people. As part of the nation-wide highway program our California Department of Public Works is spending at the rate of a million dollars a day. Should we not ask ourselves: "Where will these highways lead?" "Will there be left any place worth going to?" "Where will our teeming millions, when they take the road, find relief from the tensions of modern life and the healing influence of contact with nature as created?"

These are not new questions, but they have not been fully answered, and will not be unless programs like that of the National Conference on State Parks continue and increase.

And one more thing. The heart of our movement is a thing of the spirit, although the material that we deal with is the land. The quest for beauty is the basis of our great travel industry. Sightseeing is by far the predominant form of outdoor recreation. In the midst of the turmoil of administration and the perfection of our techniques we must remember this.

It is a high calling that has as its purpose to assure the people of the future that they will have the great experiences in the out-of-doors that we have had. It has been my privilege, as it has been yours, to help preserve representative examples of the great pageant of America. In working to maintain this environment we have been a part of it. There are many scenes that I like to remember: the lengthening shadows of the Sequoias, the flight of the White Ibis, the pastel colors of hardwood forests in the Fall, the gleam of glaciers, the battle of sea and land, the thunder and mist of waterfalls, the silence that hangs over the habitations of forgotten peoples. Or the quieter but no less satisfying beauty of lands and forests and waters preserved in many hundreds of state parks, such as Lake Itasca in Minnesota.

Concern for preserving these spectacles for themselves and as an environment for active outdoor recreation is at the heart of the state park philosophy. The spirit and meaning behind this concern is the all-important thing, but, as I have said, it is hard to put in words. Many have thought about this, and quite a few, like John Muir, have written eloquently about it. Turning to the Redwoods that I know best, I think of Dr. John C. Merriam's statement that "they connect us as by a hand touch with all the centuries

that they have known"; or Edwin Markham's that "they seem to be forms of immortality standing here among the transitory shapes of time"; or the poetic words of Joseph Hergesheimer regarding Bull Creek Flat, now in the Rockefeller Forest:

"Nothing could bring back the serenity the forest had accumulated after a hundred million years. Standing in a grove I thought of the bitter and vain resentment that the future—when it learned that a commerce was not enough to keep the heart alive—would hold against the past, our present. The grace of the towering trees masked their gigantic span; the ground, in perpetual shadow, held only flowering oxalis and emerald ferns. It was raining very softly. The fallen trunks of an utter remoteness, too great to see over, were green with moss. The whisper of the wind was barely audible, far off, reflective; the gloom in the trees was clear, wet and mild. It was the past. And this was the Redwoods' secret, their special magic, that they absolved, blotted out the fever of time, the wasted years, the sickness of mind, in which men spent the loneliness of their lives."

All this, I hope, has bearing upon the philosophy of state parks.

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