

A LONG ROAD:  
HOW JIM CROW AFFECTED THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF RECREATIONAL AREAS ALONG  
THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY

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ABSTRACT

**A LONG ROAD:**

**HOW JIM CROW AFFECTED THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF RECREATIONAL AREAS  
ALONG THE BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY**

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Policies and practices employed by the National Park Service (NPS) relating to the creation of segregated recreational facilities in its southern parks and sites during the Jim Crow and modern Civil Rights eras is a part of history that has not yet been thoroughly investigated and communicated to the general public. In a mandate to bring this history to light, the NPS has commissioned a few noteworthy studies in the past relating to these policies and practices as exercised at particular properties, yet additional research is warranted as to their effect at other southern parks and sites. This thesis specifically focused on the Blue Ridge Parkway (Parkway), a major roadway operated by the NPS that traverses through the states of Virginia and North Carolina. This investigation was conducted in three phases initially aimed on identifying NPS documentation that reveals policies and practices; next, evaluating how policies and practices affected the development, construction, and operation of the Parkway; and finally, through interviews, ascertaining what historical interpretations have traditionally been provided to visitors of the Parkway relating to these policies and practices. This thesis not only contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the topic, but also provides resources that could assist the NPS in its effort to transfer this information to the public realm via amendments to site management documents and supplements to site interpretation.

Keywords: National Park Service, Blue Ridge Parkway, segregation policies, segregation practices, Jim Crow, Civil Rights, recreational areas, site interpretation

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 *NPS Mission*

The National Park Service (NPS) is on a mission to identify and document its own policies and practices relating to the creation of racialized segregated spaces in its parks and sites located in the Southern region during the Jim Crow and modern Civil Rights eras. By its own admission, the NPS knows that this is an under-studied and under-documented part of history. Although to date the NPS has commissioned several noteworthy studies relating to segregation policies and practices at specific Southern parks, opportunity remains to expand on that research and produce more studies at additional sites.<sup>1</sup> The NPS also proposes to link interpretive historic themes, including the issue of segregation, across its own sites and time to “create the context for interpreting the stories of not only important historical figures/events, but how they were shaped and influenced by other events and people in the nation’s history. While not every site in the National Park System will relate to every racial and ethnic group, connecting interpretive themes in meaningful ways across time and space may help broaden the context and relevance of specific NPS units to include constituencies that have yet to be

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<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Interior. Task Agreement P16AC01455 under Cooperative Agreement P15AC00289 between the United States Department of Interior, National Park Service and the Organization of American Historians (2016), 1.

engaged.”<sup>2</sup> The extant research in combination with future contextual and site-specific analysis will enable the NPS to satisfy its commitment to promote a history at its sites that is more inclusive of all Americans.

This study generally investigated the policies and practices of the NPS relating to the creation of segregated recreational facilities in its Southern parks and sites during the Jim Crow and modern Civil Rights eras. Based on that contextual research, a targeted study of the Blue Ridge Parkway was conducted to determine the segregation policies and practices followed during its development, construction, and operation. As a result of this research, recommendations are provided that could aid the NPS in its effort to enhance the interpretative narrative of the Parkway to include this segregation history, to amend its management documents to reflect it, and to incorporate it into a larger thematic chronicle of segregation practices across its sites. The effort to communicate this history to a variety of audiences could serve to innovatively engage the public, including a “historically disenfranchised” and “underserved” community, with an important shared history so that the stories of all Americans are told and not forgotten over time.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Estelle Stanfield McCown, “Evaluation of National Park Service 21<sup>st</sup> Century Relevancy Initiatives: Case Studies Addressing Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the National Park Service” (PhD diss., University of Vermont, 2013), 21, accessed January 14, 2017, <http://scholarwork.uvm.edu/graddis/2201>.

<sup>3</sup> United States Department of Interior, Task Agreement, 3.

## **1.2 Thesis Organization**

This thesis includes general background information with regard to the commitment of the NPS to study the issue of spatial segregation; factors relating to NPS site visitors: demographics, experiences, and interpretations; issues in presenting a complex and/or difficult site interpretation; segregation generally and as it relates to public parks and recreational facilities, and more specifically to NPS parks/sites located in the South; and a summary of two significant studies commissioned by the NPS. Also presented is the evaluation of the research conducted which is divided into two parts with the first relating to NPS policies and procedures sourced from the primary documents housed at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, and second, from the primary documents housed at the Parkway Archives in Asheville, North Carolina. This analysis is then followed by a synopsis of the interviews of Parkway personnel performed to determine whether this information is incorporated into historical interpretation provided on the Parkway. Finally, recommendations are suggested as to how this segregation history could be transferred to the public realm either through amendments to site management documents and/or supplements to site interpretation. Various images that illustrate, document, and evidence NPS segregation policies and practices are included to help further explain the information revealed in this thesis.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 *NPS Commitment*

The NPS has mandated that the history of its policies and practices about the creation of segregated recreational facilities at its sites located in the south during the Jim Crow and modern Civil Rights eras is knowledge that should be disseminated to the public. The NPS acknowledges that this period in its history is “sparsely documented” and that a comprehensive contextual study could be achieved by building on the few “notable site-specific analyses” commissioned by the NPS over the past decade and by reviewing its own documents and records.<sup>4</sup> Following the suggestions made by scholars, the NPS needs to take a progressive approach, one that is self-reflexive and more in line with modern techniques of interpretation, in its effort to uncover this history.<sup>5</sup> To achieve this goal, it will require the NPS to sanction a review of its own legislative and organizational documents that culminated in these segregation policies and procedures so that an unbiased and thorough evaluation and analysis can be undertaken to put this history in context. The NPS is committed to this effort and has

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<sup>4</sup> United States Department of Interior, Task Agreement, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Mitchell Whisnant, et al. *Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Park Service*. (Bloomington: Organization of American Historians, 2011), 98.

conceived an official strategy for scholars to complete a comprehensive contextual study of this nature and encourages the participation of others.<sup>6</sup>

As part of that strategy, the NPS is also interested in the identification of locations in Southern states where spatial segregation was the practice to aid it in pinpointing sites for further in-depth research in the form of case studies. The ultimate purpose for these case studies is to identify, evaluate, and interpret site resources within the context of racial segregation in order to increase public knowledge and understanding of this layer of significance, to preserve this history in the interpretation and management documentation of studied sites, to make this history available to all visitors including underserved communities and diverse groups of Americans, and to link this theme over time and place to other NPS parks and sites.<sup>7</sup>

## **2.2 NPS Site Visitors: Demographics, Experience and Interpretations**

Research has also been performed by and at the request of the NPS to determine avenues to attract diverse racial and ethnic groups to its sites, to adjust those demographics to reflect the American population, and to increase the number of visitors overall. It is well

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<sup>6</sup> United States Department of Interior, Task Agreement, 1.

<sup>7</sup> United States Department of Interior, Task Agreement, 2.

documented in a multitude of studies from various disciplines that nearly 80% or more of the visitors to NPS parks and sites across the spectrum are non-Hispanic Whites.<sup>8</sup> Clearly the racial and ethnic demographics of NPS site visitors do not reflect the population demographics of the country. Rebecca Estelle Stanfield McCown in her dissertation work that evaluated the ethnic diversity of visitors to NPS sites provided insight into the reasons for this incongruity. McCown sets forth two areas of significance, first noting that there is a lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the NPS workforce, and secondly, that members of minority groups have typically been excluded in the planning and management aspects at parks and sites. She notes that both factors have a great impact on site interpretation which ultimately influences whether a site is attractive to a diverse group of visitors. McCown opines that preservation at historical sites run by the NPS has often ignored the importance of the inclusion of stories of all Americans associated with its sites preferring to focus on buildings of architectural significance and narratives of the European American community only.<sup>9</sup> A claim that the NPS has not denied. In an attempt to offer suggestions to the NPS to resolve this problem, McCown extracted information from her study participants who indicated that producing interpretative historical themes alone was not enough to make parks and sites meaningful to the under-represented

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<sup>8</sup> McCown, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 20.

visitor, but that a satisfying experience could be accomplished by including interpretation that addresses differing values relating to cultural significance along with historical importance, thereby creating a broader story. McCown suggests that the NPS work to develop such stories into interpretative themes and connect these themes across time and site throughout its system.<sup>10</sup>

Other studies commissioned by the NPS clearly indicate that the institution is aware that interpretation is a key factor in achieving diversity and improving visitor experience. As stated in the executive summary of a study completed by a team comprised of members from the Organization of American Historians (OAH) led by Anne Whisnant regarding the overall state of the NPS in 2013, “Millions of Americans each year cultivate a deeper appreciation of the nation’s past through encounters with historic buildings, landscapes, and narratives preserved by the NPS and its constituent agencies and programs.”<sup>11</sup> Yet in addition to providing that praise to the NPS for the work that it has done and continues to do, these researchers also denote that the NPS lags behind in what it delivers to the public, and warns if changes are not made with regard to interpretation, the organization will not only be unable to influence diversity in the demographics of its visitors, but it may not attract future visitors of *any* race or

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Whisnant, et al., 1.

ethnicity. These researchers advise the NPS to expand the narratives at historic sites beyond the current focus on “structures that confine history in isolated silos . . . by often narrow and static conceptions of history’s scope” and engage in interpretations that are less “timid.”<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, to improve visitor experience, the Whisnant team focused on another finding, one that related to the history of the NPS itself and the connection with that history to specific sites in interpretation. Listed as a high priority in the study is a recommendation to “Encourage parks to think about how to incorporate their own histories and the historical context of their founding and enabling legislation into the interpretation.”<sup>13</sup> This self-reflexive approach is one that “acknowledges the position of the storyteller vis-à-vis the story being told.”<sup>14</sup> These researchers found that for the NPS, the constraints of boundaries, enabling legislation, and founding histories might, in fact, restrict it from interpretations beyond the parameters ascribed to in those documents. However, the NPS has experience dealing with such limitations as evidenced when it successfully navigated roadblocks at Shenandoah National Park (Shenandoah), for example, where it provided a more nuanced historical interpretation in the case of racial segregation. The researchers recommended that efforts of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 98.

this type continue elsewhere and be enhanced by allowing scholars to visit parks and “consider the relationships between founding legislation and current interpretation and scholarship, and explore opportunities to expand interpretation, where appropriate, beyond park boundaries and legislative mandates so as to incorporate relevant contexts and histories that have emerged since the site’s founding” and “continue to engage the nation’s most knowledgeable scholars to write thematic and park-based historical studies [to be published as NPS handbooks] that connect individual sites to larger themes and contexts and move away from the interpretation of parks as isolated islands.”<sup>15</sup>

Other research exists signifying that development of inclusive narratives is one solution for diversifying park visitors. Myron Floyd, a scholar versed in race and ethnicity issues as they relate to the NPS, believes that the lack of interest of African Americans in NPS sites is because the events and/or people commemorated are of no relevance or are outright offensive to them. Floyd strongly suggests that more research be done with regard to the significance of sites and interpretations be revised aligning both to be more reflective of the history of all Americans.<sup>16</sup> Another study performed by a team of researchers from North Carolina State

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Myron Floyd, National Park Service and Department of Interior, “Race, Ethnicity and Use of the National Park System” (1999). *All U.S. Government Documents (Utah Regional Depository)*. Paper 427, 18.

analyzed information obtained directly from NPS staff employees to determine what modifications could be recommended to the NPS to diversify the visitor population at two urban parks that inherently, due to location, had great potential to be utilized by a more diverse population. For this study, the team conducted research through interviews of NPS employees at the sites, whereby these employees indicated that in order to attract members of varied ethnic and racial groups, site interpretation needed to be more representative of all Americans, otherwise there was no potential to increase visitation by minority groups. These research findings also revealed that these employees insisted that the input and support of NPS administration would be essential in successfully updating or supplementing existing site interpretation as they were not in a position to provide that alternative narrative themselves.<sup>17</sup>

Others concur that NPS administrative input and support is paramount. Seth Bruggeman recognizes the importance of scholarly research and the coordinated effort on the part of the NPS with its employees to assure that the development of interpretative themes was not left to one or two individuals at a site and/or was merely generated for the sole purpose of increasing the number of visitors. Bruggeman confirms that the interpretations at many NPS sites are not inclusive of the stories of all Americans and cautions that care must be

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<sup>17</sup> David C. Santucci, et al., "Visitor Services Staff Perceptions of Strategies to Encourage Diversity at Two Urban National Parks." *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* 32, no. 3 (2014): 23.

taken to avoid the creation of fictitious interpretations designed to enhance what he terms a “White history.”<sup>18</sup>

In the case of the George Washington Birthplace National Monument (Washington Birthplace), the topic of his dissertation, Bruggeman supplies an example. His research suggests that racial discrimination ran rampant at the property from its inception as an NPS site in the 1930s up through the 1960s excluding African Americans in every way. Only when the visiting public questioned where African Americans lived and worked at the Washington Birthplace did the historical narrative become augmented to include the issue of slavery in the interpretive story. Originally the history of the site focused on an account of the Washington family, the architecture, and the artifacts of the buildings on site, but as Bruggeman indicates that history “was, in every respect, White history.” To supplement that interpretation, Phillip Hough, the NPS superintendent in the early years, proposed an historical re-enactment of activities viewed as typical for that site and times, opting to put on display a family slave working the fields of the property. Bruggeman relays that according to correspondence and other site documentation, the land designated for this re-enactment was chosen randomly and was not historically accurate regarding where fields were once located on the property. In addition, cotton was the

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<sup>18</sup> Seth C. Bruggeman, “George Washington Birthplace National Monument Administrative History 1930-2000,” National Park Service, (2006): 158.

crop selected to be planted in that field, even though there was no indication that cotton had ever been grown on these lands. In providing a historical narrative based on inaccurate details such as these, Bruggeman describes it as an attempt to support an “especially prickly sort of Old South nostalgia” aimed to show visitors “how good life was back when racial and class categories were clearly defined and easily managed.” It is interesting to note that even with knowledge of the inaccuracies in this historical account, the interpretation was successfully promoted by Superintendent Hough and federally sanctioned.<sup>19</sup>

Other scholars reveal that interpretations at NPS sites and parks have not typically included complex issues like segregation due to the fact that historians have not always interpreted it well for the NPS. The NPS does not deny that constrained site interpretation is a major and problematic issue and one that it is attempting to rectify. Documents generated by the NPS reflect that it is aware that established historic site interpretations must be reviewed and updated to ensure that the themes align with current scholarship and changing public values so that they do not limit visitor experience.<sup>20</sup> And site interpretation is an issue that the NPS has taken seriously in recent years as evidenced by other collaborative efforts with the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> National Park Service, Petersburg National Battlefield General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (2004): *intro iv*.

OAH in projects that its scholars worked diligently on to ensure that “the public receives current, nuanced, and thought-provoking information about the nation’s past.” The OAH and the NPS also collaborate on National Historic Landmark Projects whereby they are engaged in theme studies that are utilized by the NPS to teach and train its staff “on areas of U.S. history that are underrepresented in preservation efforts,” most recently evidenced by a thematic study on civil rights completed in the summer of 2016.<sup>21</sup>

Scholars like McCown, Bruggeman, and those historians on Whisnant’s team believe that the development of interpretations that communicate inclusive histories could positively diversify the demographics of NPS site visitors. Yet any effort by the NPS to create a more racially- and ethnically-diverse visitor population through the use of inclusive narratives could prove to be challenging due to the potential to expose difficult and distressing issues.

### **2.3 Interpretations: Complex and/or Difficult**

In a study of the historical interpretation offered at the Scott Joplin House State Historic Site located in St. Louis, Timothy Baumann and his colleagues argue the need to embrace an uncomfortable history of the neighborhood’s deplorable living conditions in the narrative,

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<sup>21</sup> Organization of American Historians, <http://www.oah.org/programs/the-oah-national-park-service-collaboration/> (accessed January 6, 2017).

stating that this effort has the potential to connect past issues with contemporary ones. These authors believe that without the inclusion of controversial issues, institutions “violate professional standards of objectivity” and in the end “damage the credibility of the institutions that deliver history to the public. Moreover, playing it safe deprives history of its power to promote constructive social and political change.”<sup>22</sup> Whisnant and her team echoed the same sentiments when providing suggestions to the NPS in their report containing one such recommendation that “urges the NPS to recommit to history as one of its core purposes and invest in building a top-flight program of historical research and interpretation that will foster consistently effective and integrated historic preservation and robust, place-based visitor engagement with history.” The key actions suggested to accomplish this involve not only the expansion of interpretative themes beyond existing resources, but also the connection of sites with larger histories that honestly address conflict and controversy, and the “welcomed” understanding of contested and evolving American civic heritage.<sup>23</sup>

In this regard, the sentiment of other researchers corresponds. Baumann and his team state, “In the quest for contemporary relevance and more inclusive audiences, museum and

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<sup>22</sup> Timothy Baumann, et al., “Interpreting Uncomfortable History at the Scott Joplin House State Historic Site in St. Louis, Missouri.” *The Public Historian* 33, no. 2 (2011): 38.

<sup>23</sup> Whisnant, et al., 4.

public agencies have acknowledged their obligation to explore divisive social issues, including the ugly history of racial discord. One of the most powerful arguments advanced on behalf of full disclosure is that the revelation of brutal truths can mend social issues."<sup>24</sup> Pressing the issue further, these researchers reveal that it is interpretations of this caliber that have the greatest potential to "resonate powerfully" with racial and ethnic minorities, those who the NPS labels as underserved and underrepresented at its parks and sites.<sup>25</sup> O'Brien agrees, indicating that the legacy of Jim Crow practice continues and that the only way to move forward on divisive race issues is to take a look at the past, address it, and incorporate the history in interpretation, in what he refers to as an "honest accounting." O'Brien states that this type of history as told through the parks "would serve as an acknowledgement of where we have been, and how far we still need to go to resolve the enduring problems of race in America."<sup>26</sup> And James Pease references the work of social scientists when he summarizes the literature available about parks and underserved audiences. In this research, he mentions the work of David Uzzell and Roy Ballantyne who refer to complex or difficult interpretation as "hot" interpretation representing that if not used in a sensationalistic way to lure visitors to

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<sup>24</sup> Baumann, et al., 42.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>26</sup> William O'Brien, "The Strange Career of a Florida State Park: Uncovering a Jim Crow Past." *Historical Geography* 35 (2007): 180.

sites, it can “help people more fully understand and more deeply appreciate a site” thereby uniting people to understand the issues, and in a sense through the sharing of stories, provide the vehicle to heal divisions.<sup>27</sup>

Another research team led by Ballantyne denotes that the use of hot interpretation is “a way to challenge visitors to reflect on and question their own attitudes and actions regarding racial tolerance, understanding, and social justice. It’s significant that . . . the intended audience was predominantly one whose prior knowledge and past experience of the events portrayed might differ from the perspective presented in the exhibition.” Their work explores “the ways in which a hot interpretation of contested history can facilitate visitor emotional engagement through a reflective process leading to a reassessment of personal perspectives, attitudes, and behavioral intentions.” These researchers discuss the identification of the official interpretation of a site, being one that leans to a majority group and one that in “the presentation of cultural heritage has been used to reinforce social divisions rather than heal social divides.”<sup>28</sup> As a result of this research, they discovered that the sharing of hot interpretation, if balanced with narrative and evidence, can “deeply affect” visitors, providing a

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<sup>27</sup> James L. Pease, Ph.D., “Parks and Underserved Audiences, an Annotated Literature Review.” *Journal of Interpretation Research* 20, no. (2015): 18.

<sup>28</sup> Roy Ballantyne, Jan Packer, and Nigel Bond, “Interpreting Shared and Contested Histories: The Broken Links Exhibition.” *Curator: The Museum Journal* 55, no. 2 (2012): 2.

greater understanding that could lead to empathy, respect, and admiration while engaging in the possibility of a better future by re-evaluating how past issues maintain an influence on current ones.<sup>29</sup>

Whisnant's team does not deny that dealing with controversial facts and the resulting interpretations can be extremely difficult due not only to the lack of available and reliable research, but also because of the fear of negative repercussions by park management and/or political pressures. However, they are proponents of promoting what they term as "fearful" interpretations, those that are difficult and/or complex in nature, because they allow the inclusion of new scholarship and possess the ability to associate history with current issues.<sup>30</sup> They also advocate that the NPS fulfill its commitment as an educator and provide more complex and difficult interpretation at sites due to the fact that its visitors have the ability to approach it, disseminate it, and react to it.<sup>31</sup>

And this is what the NPS intends to do through future efforts uncovering additional research on diversity, visitor experience, and historical interpretation that will contribute to a better understanding of the issues. Yet even without further analysis, it is clear that the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>30</sup> Whisnant, et al., 110.

<sup>31</sup> Whisnant, et al., 111.

mandate for change by the NPS is one that is warranted and long overdue. In the case of racial segregation, the NPS agrees that there clearly is a need to build on what has already been interpreted, by either complementing or correcting that history, to expose how Jim Crow laws affected the rights of African Americans and their use and enjoyment of NPS sites.<sup>32</sup>

#### **2.4 Segregation – General Context**

Federal legislation established both prior to and after the Civil War influenced and resulted in the creation of segregation laws in many states located in the South to keep Whites in control and African Americans without equal opportunities. The efforts to abolish slavery, provide citizenship and protection for former slaves, and the right to vote in federal and state matters as prescribed by the Constitutional amendments passed between 1865 and 1870 intensified the desire of many Southern Whites to push for laws that would circumvent equality between races. As a result of the 1896 Supreme Court decision in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, states were afforded the right to segregate races in public spaces as long as separate but equal facilities were provided. In the end, the passage of Jim Crow laws focused on enforcing that separation between African Americans and Whites in virtually all public venues

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<sup>32</sup> E. Dabney, Downs, G., Lowe, T., and Titus, J., “*The Civil War: The Reconstruction Era and Historic Sites*” (presentation, Gettysburg College Civil War Institute Conference, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, June 19, 2016) accessed October 16, 2016, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?410244-4/reconstruction-era-historic-sites>.

including local, state and federal parks and recreational facilities.<sup>33</sup> This utilization of separate-but-equal legislation was first sanctioned in the designation of cars in the railroad industry, then migrated to other venues, including dictating seating arrangements on streetcars, housing disposition in prison systems, configurations of residential communities, and beyond. According to Charles Wynes, as the laws expanded and custom prevailed, the separate-but-equal philosophy eventually led to complete banishment of African Americans in many public settings. Race politics played a major role in the passage of Jim Crow laws because many citizens in the South promoted the supremacy of Whites through exclusive business and social organizations that lobbied diligently to preserve that superiority. In states like Virginia, for example, the means to segregate Whites from African Americans was accomplished through the passing of the Racial Integrity Act in 1924 and the Virginia Public Assemblages Act of 1926, the first defining the meaning of “White” and the latter calling for segregation in all places of public assembly between Whites and African Americans.<sup>34</sup>

## **2.5 Segregation – Context: Public Parks and Recreational Facilities**

There is much written about segregation generally in parks and other public places that

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<sup>33</sup> O’Brien, 165.

<sup>34</sup> Charles E. Wynes, “The Evolution of Jim Crow Laws in Twentieth Century Virginia.” *Phylon* (1960-) 28, no. 4 (1967): 418.

aids in explaining why the NPS developed its policies and engaged in the practice of creating segregated areas and facilities in its Southern parks. In his research, Harold Rabinowitz states that generally, as part of the park movement of the late 1800s, it was not unusual for White and Blacks to enjoy separate parks, facilities, and concessions. Rabinowitz provides historical context with regard to the issue of segregation in recreational venues and Southern race relations during the 25 years immediately following the end of the Civil War. Rabinowitz suggests that when forced to integrate via early federal legislation, many Southern jurisdictions chose to segregate, even though prior to the legislation, there may not have been any mandated exclusion of Blacks from public areas, but rather it was more a result of local custom. This revelation led Rabinowitz to consider whether segregation was at certain times, in fact, a compromise – a middle ground that was less offensive to both groups as it provided Whites with their own segregated areas and African Americans with business opportunities to develop facilities that afforded them financial reward, a sense of control, and an awareness of identity.<sup>35</sup>

With regard to separate-but-equal mandates, O'Brien tells us that several Southern states did not enact legislation prescribing segregation, but rather segregation practices in

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<sup>35</sup> Howard N. Rabinowitz, "From Exclusion to Segregation: Southern Race Relations, 1865-1890." *The Journal of American History* 63, no. 2 (1976): 348.

parks located in Florida and North Carolina adhered to the separate-but-equal practice due to local custom, that being African Americans and Whites traditionally used separate parks.<sup>36</sup> And so with attitudes and intent of this nature, and without federal agencies intervening with regard to constitutionality, at the state level at least, the creation and use of public parks and recreational facilities often followed the custom of creating separate areas and/or facilities for African Americans and Whites. That practice manifested in various forms of segregation including the creation of separate sites altogether, or designated areas within a site for African Americans, or a restriction on days and times for the use of a site by the Black population. Many White Southerners believed that adhering to custom or in passing Jim Crow laws versus supporting federal law was a viable way to combat the push for civil rights, and if separate areas or facilities were created, or at least an attempt was made to create them, there was no better way to obstruct the effort.<sup>37</sup>

Yet the creation of separate parks and recreational facilities for African Americans did not always guarantee that the sites would be equal, and policies and ordinances were established that often thwarted development of sites for the use of the Black population, or if

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<sup>36</sup> O'Brien, 165.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 171.

developed, they were inferior in quality or located at a distance that detracted African Americans from being able to fully utilize them. O'Brien cites Prince Edward Park, a state park located in Virginia, as an example of a site that was designed for exclusive use by Blacks. Prince Edward Park was located hundreds of miles from Virginia's populated urban centers where the majority of African American residents lived, creating both the travel and time barriers that impeded many from enjoying the park. Conversely, however, located close to those same urban centers, were a multitude of state parks reserved for the use of White patrons only. Clearly this scenario provided the White community with convenient park options that could be utilized frequently for their pleasure.<sup>38</sup> Other examples of this inconvenience regarding park location were prevalent in the south. McQueeney points out that in Louisiana, in an effort to rid the beaches along Lake Pontchartrain of Blacks visitors, the city of New Orleans built a Black-only beach located in a less-than-desirable and polluted area of the lake, far from the African American community and one that could not be accessed by public transportation.<sup>39</sup> Due to the distant locations of parks, African Americans found themselves in Catch-22 situations, when a designated Black-only park was not utilized, then oftentimes, governing authorities deduced

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>39</sup> Kevin G. McQueeney, "Playing With Jim Crow: African American Private Parks in Early Twentieth Century New Orleans" (Masters' thesis, University of New Orleans, Paper 1989, 2015), 56.

that there was no need for the park, reverting it back to a park to be used by Whites, and/or designated the area for another purpose altogether. These were the types of roadblocks to the construction of facilities that were often viewed by Whites as unavoidable, yet these tactics served to silently undermine progress and prolonged opposition to civil rights legislation.

McQueeney informs us that public spaces, including parks, located in New Orleans were “increasingly” segregated following the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896 and continued to be so until 1958.<sup>40</sup> McQueeney explains that segregation in the parks was sanctioned either by custom or via city ordinances, and enforcement was imposed at the hands of private White citizens or by city police officers. As a result, in New Orleans, the Black community fought diligently to establish private parks and during the early twentieth century managed to create a number of them.<sup>41</sup> It is interesting to note, as McQueeney states, that “these private parks not only provided African Americans with relief from the stress of being around White people, but also the opportunity to enjoy cultural activities and economic prosperity, coupled with a means to challenge Jim Crow with regard to the segregation of space.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 38.

Mark Foster adds another dimension to the issue of segregation and the use of public parks and recreation facilities focusing on the vacation, travel and leisure habits of African Americans during the period between 1890 and 1945. Foster informs us that segregation practices under Jim Crow laws produced difficult and often dangerous travel situations especially when dealing with auto repairs, foodservice, and lodging. He references a publication, *The Negro Motorist Green Book: A Guide for Enjoyable Travel*, created to assist and inform African American travelers on where they could safely and amicably receive these types of services on the road. The publication included listings of White-operated businesses that welcomed Black customers and also the many establishments operated by Blacks for Blacks only, primarily so African Americans could enjoy leisure activities without worry of any ramifications from Whites.<sup>43</sup> This publication was introduced by Victor Green in 1936 in an effort to provide, at least initially, relevant travel-related information to Blacks in the New York City area, but it grew in popularity and ultimately morphed into a publication that disseminated information to aid those traveling throughout the United States. By the 1947 edition, the introduction to the *Green Book* included the following paragraph:

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<sup>43</sup> Mark S. Foster, "In the Face of 'Jim Crow': Prosperous Blacks and Vacations, Travel and Outdoor Leisure, 1890-1945," *The Journal of Negro History*, 84, no. 2 (1999): 142.

There will be a day sometime in the near future when this guide will not have to be published. That is when we as a race will have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States. It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go wherever we please, and without embarrassment. But until that time comes we shall continue to publish this information for your convenience each year.<sup>44</sup>

Clearly beyond popularity, a need for this guide existed evidenced by its continued publication through 1967 prompting one to conclude that even if African Americans had the desire to travel to parks and recreational facilities, the inherent danger in the act of traveling in and of itself could prevent them from making the effort.

## **2.6 Segregation: Context - NPS**

Sanctioned segregation practices existed within the NPS system as well. Floyd provides specific references to these practices which resulted from the Southern battlefield parks and forts that came into the NPS system during the 1930s. Along with the transfer of land and buildings at these sites, the tradition of following local custom or law regarding segregation impacted their use, therefore based on location, oftentimes spatial segregation was legally sanctioned at campgrounds, swimming pools, golf courses, and other recreational facilities. Floyd concludes that these practices have had a long-term impact and reveal why African

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<sup>44</sup> The New York Public Library Digital Collections, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/the-green-book#/?tab=about> (accessed November 1, 2016).

Americans do not find parks appealing as a resource to this day.<sup>45</sup>

Other sites operated by the NPS have been reviewed in the scholarly research where segregation was the policy and practice. As part of a project undertaken by the PBS affiliate WETA in association with Florentine Films to produce mini-documentaries relating to the NPS, Susan Shumaker provides specifics about Hot Springs National Park in Arkansas and Great Smokey Mountain National Park in Tennessee. In her findings, Shumaker includes excerpts of correspondence exchanged between NPS directors, park superintendents, politicians, and others in the battle for segregation practices to cease and/or continue at these Southern parks.<sup>46</sup>

Two prior studies commissioned by the NPS, one of Washington Birthplace and the other of Shenandoah, highlight racial segregation issues and provide excellent baseline information about the policies and practices of the NPS at parks located in the south, and in both studies, sites specifically located in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

### **2.6.1 *George Washington Birthplace National Monument***

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<sup>45</sup> Myron F. Floyd, "Managing National Parks in a Multicultural Society: Searching for Common Ground," *George Wright Forum*, 18, no. 3 (2001): 49.

<sup>46</sup> Susan Shumaker, "Untold Stories from America's National Parks," *Segregation in the National Parks*. 1 (2009): 15.

Research relating to Washington Birthplace was conducted by [Seth] Bruggeman who prepared a 316-page Administrative History for the NPS in 2006 while a graduate student at the College of William & Mary. In this report, Bruggeman cites that segregation practices were, in fact, followed at Washington Birthplace and that the reason for this was due to adherence by the NPS to the Jim Crow laws enacted in Virginia, whereby the NPS allowed Virginia law to prevail and simply accepted it. Bruggeman states that at the Washington Birthplace and at other Southern sites “federal parks generally recognized local laws and customs regarding segregation of public facilities” and that the “National Park Service – at least during the 1930s – did keep pace with Jim Crow.” Bruggeman does reveal, however, that “historical accounts of NPS policy regarding segregation in southeastern parks are regrettably few” and he mentions the debate among historians as to whether the NPS had “formalized planning of segregated facilities during the 1930s.” For this reason, Bruggeman encourages further research on the subject indicating that “it is imperative that a substantial study of segregation in the parks be undertaken by the NPS.”<sup>47</sup>

With regard to spatial segregation, Bruggeman’s study points out that in 1931, when the Washington Birthplace came under NPS control, its visitors were predominantly White, yet

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<sup>47</sup> Bruggeman, 114.

historically some local Black residents often accessed the property to fish or swim at certain beaches. Evidence located in NPS documents by Bruggeman indicates that Arthur E. Demaray, the NPS Associate Director at the time, encouraged the development of specific beach areas for “Colored people” and suggested that it was made clear to them that they should use these areas exclusively. This resulted in the NPS creating segregated areas for use by African Americans and, as Bruggeman points out, Washington Birthplace was the first NPS site in its system to follow local custom and/or law that resulted in segregated public facilities. He also cites evidence of segregation practices found in correspondence written by Demaray and addressed to Horace M. Albright, the NPS Director, indicating that if a lodge and tea room were to be built on the site, as planned by the site’s benefactors, then the NPS would be required to build a similar area on the site where “Colored people can go.”<sup>48</sup> Beyond correspondence, Bruggeman also discovered in researching the official publications of the NPS that segregated facilities were planned and built in other Southern states like North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee due to Jim Crow compliance and the precedent set at Washington Birthplace.

What is incredibly telling, according to Bruggeman, is the fact that “institutional racism existed at all levels of park governance” citing an example of correspondence reflecting that

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

sentiment between other NPS officials, including letters written by Philip R. Hough, the superintendent of Washington Birthplace. In one such exchange Hough indicated that the development and promotion of segregated facilities would attract too many “Colored” people to Washington Birthplace, and therefore the existence of such facilities should not be publicized. Bruggeman uncovered further evidence that these racial attitudes continued for decades and were not admonished by higher authority at the NPS convincing him that this behavior created “an uncomfortable racial climate” at the site.<sup>49</sup> Bruggeman was able to document these racial sentiments well into the 1960s.

With regard to racial beliefs as reflected in interpretation, Bruggeman details that the Washington Birthplace was the NPS’ first foray into historic preservation, not only in planning but in interpretative efforts as well, and that the NPS was navigating unknown territory both literally and figuratively. Much of the development at Washington Birthplace was financed by donors and organized by those with visions of interpretation running to celebrate colonial times and its leaders, mirroring a national trend. The inclination toward colonial revival was considered at the time as an expression of patriotism and it grew rapidly in popularity. However, this interpretative theme ran counter to adhering to the historical integrity of the site

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<sup>49</sup> Bruggeman, 151.

as mandated by Congress, yet Bruggeman states that when Hough arrives on site in 1932, he was a bit overwhelmed with the desires of financial donors and their political influence. Bruggeman describes it this way, “Unbeknownst to him, Hough would soon inherit the complicated legacy of these controversies and find himself embroiled in one of the most difficult interpretive challenges in NPS history.”<sup>50</sup> Hough worked with the donors to develop their interpretations, yet he also had ideas of his own, one specifically related to the issue of slavery on the site which was riddled with misinformation and racial undertones. Hough set up a working farm at Washington Birthplace and hired an African American to live on the site, work in the fields, and engage with the visitors. Bruggeman describes it this way, “Moreover Hough’s inclusion of cotton at the farm – an inappropriate crop for a park attempting to maintain a distinctly colonial character – combined with Johnson’s [the slave reenactor] presence reveals that Hough’s crop demonstration area may have constructed an innovative interpretive effort, its educational message suffered from a lack of historical understanding and thus conveyed less about the life of George Washington than it did the prevailing racial attitudes of the time.” Unfortunately, over time, these attitudes did not improve regarding Hough’s racial viewpoints as seen in an official report he authored in 1947 upon Johnson’s

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 33.

death that praised him for his service. Included in the accolades, Hough described Johnson as “the old darkey” and “the last of the property’s slaves to pass away.”<sup>51</sup>

Bruggeman presents several other letters from Hough filled with sentiments of disregard for Black visitors, including one that, despite many complaints, defends his treatment of African Americans referencing that there was no poor treatment of “Colored” visitors, that they were accommodated sufficiently, but that there was no reason to encourage them to visit the site.<sup>52</sup> And these attitudes continued into the 1960s as revealed in correspondence from Hough’s successor, Russell A. Gibbs, when he describes grievances made by Black visitors to his office in a report to his superiors at the NPS wherein he refers to them as “mammy cats” and provides the steps he has taken to silence their complaints. Bruggeman concludes that because there appeared to be no admonishments for such actions and words by superiors at the NPS, this type of behavior was condoned thus allowing racial bias to prevail and the resulting segregation practices to continue whether written in official policy or not.<sup>53</sup>

Bruggeman offers information that new interpretative opportunities were instituted by the NPS between 1966 and 1980 that made reenactment and living history even more popular,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 144.

Also, at that time, more provocative thinking was developing on how to properly interpret complex issues like slavery, with a push towards efforts to deal with such topics so they could be appropriately incorporated into the narrative of the site.<sup>54</sup> Going forward Bruggeman advocates that a reflexive approach be utilized in site interpretation, one that obviously includes the history of the site, but also relays who makes the decisions as to what gets told and why as well.<sup>55</sup> Finally, Bruggeman concludes that by revising interpretation through the reconsideration of site significance, and in telling the stories of a site and the history of the site's history, a site will be launched "into the forefront of interpretation" and that it will grow from that experience.<sup>56</sup>

### **2.6.2 *Shenandoah National Park***

Erin Krutko Devlin produced a reference in a cultural history series for the NPS while working on her doctorate at the College of William & Mary. This book relates to African American travel experiences and their exposure to racial segregation at Shenandoah. In her research, Devlin reveals the cultural history of the Lewis Mountain region in Shenandoah, a recreational area that was planned, designed, and developed for the exclusive use by African

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 239

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 245.

American visitors to the park.

Devlin states, when dealing with segregation practices at Shenandoah, that the NPS was complacent and permitted state law to trump federal statutes due to pressure by local and state government officials. “The early development of the park was guided by a ‘gentleman’s agreement’ between state and national political leaders that the recreational area would be governed by the local laws and customs of Virginia. This policy was inaugurated during a period of American history when Southern congressmen wielded disproportionate influence in the halls of Congress and the federal government was not firmly committed to protecting civil rights or challenging racial discrimination.”<sup>57</sup> Devlin describes the factors relating to segregation practices in Virginia and references the restrictions provided through laws such as the Public Assemblages Act passed in 1926. This legislation provided for racial segregation in public places including halls, theaters, opera houses, motion picture shows, places of public entertainment, and public assemblage, but it did not specifically provide for the segregation of Whites and Blacks in parks, playgrounds, and recreational areas. Yet de facto segregation occurred wherein local custom was to segregate Whites and Blacks in both municipal and state

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<sup>57</sup> Erin Krutko Devlin, “Under the Sky All of Us Are Free: A Cultural History of Lewis Mountain, Racial Segregation, and African-American Visitation in Shenandoah National Park.” Williamsburg, VA: American Studies Program, College of William and Mary (2009): 3.

parks located throughout Virginia. With this in mind, the NPS in developing Shenandoah as Devlin states, defended “the construction of segregated facilities in Shenandoah National Park on the same grounds, arguing that local laws and customs should inform the development of federal parks in Southern states,” hence sealing the deal that African Americans would be discriminated against and segregated “within the boundaries of the federal park.” And once engaged in this practice at Shenandoah, it proved difficult for the NPS to challenge it as the park continued to develop in the coming years.<sup>58</sup>

Devlin also provides information relating to the battles within the NPS for change indicating that during the 1930s, the Secretary of the Interior, Harold L. Ickes, in theory was against the segregation practices that existed in Southern parks, but had some difficulty convincing politicians and, oftentimes, the superintendents of sites that the practices should change. Ickes, however, endeavored to make progress and appointed William J. Trent to the position of Advisor for Negro Affairs to the NPS in an attempt to understand racial issues and to facilitate communication for the adoption of non-segregation policies.<sup>59</sup> Although Trent’s advice was well considered by Ickes, over time, his efforts to desegregate the facilities and to end racial discrimination at Shenandoah generally were continuously blocked by park officials

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 4.

often due to their own racial bias and/or coupled with the influence of Southern politicians who believed that the NPS was bound by Virginia law.<sup>60</sup>

Due to the procedures that had been established to succumb to Virginia law, Ickes worked within those parameters and directed that separate but equal accommodations be constructed for use by African Americans, and in 1937, plans for the development of the Lewis Mountain area were in place. As Devlin points out, “Park officials believed that there would be less conflict and fewer complaints if picnic grounds, camping areas, dining facilities, and overnight cabins were constructed at Lewis Mountain exclusively for the use of African Americans and other areas were reserved for Whites,” and the Virginia Sky-Line Company, the contracted concessionaire for Shenandoah, put forth a proposal. Yet in reality, getting the area built was difficult as the principals of Virginia Sky-Line Company were fastidious in their belief that there was little demand for these facilities due to the fact that few African Americans visited the park. Eventually Lewis Mountain was developed and opened in 1940, however, the area was smaller than those developed for Whites and situated in a less-desirable section of Shenandoah. Despite it being separate and “not equal” as described by many visitors to the park, it “became an important gathering place” for African Americans and one utilized to its

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 151.

capacity.<sup>61</sup> As time progressed, the facilities at Lewis Mountain were improved and other segregated facilities were added in other areas of the park.<sup>62</sup>

During the 1940s, proposals were made to integrate Shenandoah, but these efforts were met by opposition from politicians including the very powerful Harry Flood Byrd, the one-time Governor of and 30-year U.S. Senator from Virginia. Devlin describes Byrd as a “committed segregationist” and one who “lead efforts against desegregation throughout his political career” by pushing for Virginia law and custom to prevail and by working diligently to oppose federal civil rights legislation efforts well into the 1960s. So powerful was Byrd and other Southern legislators, they could “make or break legislation” and “circumscribe serious racial reform in the Southern states.”<sup>63</sup>

In looking to determine if formal policy existed regarding segregation at Shenandoah, Devlin points to the contents of printed literature as evidence and considers that segregation was “an officially-sanctioned policy.” This opinion is based on the brochures and maps that were provided to visitors with references to Lewis Mountain as a Negro recreational area. These official maps not only served to direct African Americans to Lewis Mountain, but

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 35.

simultaneously informed Whites where the segregated facility was located. As a result of many complaints over time with regard to the notations of Lewis Mountain on the maps and brochures, the references to “Negro” use were eventually removed, however, an unofficial procedure resulted whereby park rangers directed African Americans to Lewis Mountain verbally and/or manually notated their maps as to its location.<sup>64</sup> Devlin specifies that these policies and practices continued well into the 1950s and 1960s with Black visitors adhering to Virginia customs and laws fearful of using desegregated areas until there was an eventual shift due to civil rights legislation that mandated access to Shenandoah’s other facilities.

Much of the research of both Bruggeman and Devlin, as well as others, reveals that the evidence of segregation policies and practices can be discovered in the records of the NPS found at both the National Archives and the archives of the respective sites. And although this documentation offers an illuminating picture of NPS policies and practices relating to spatial segregation, further research is required to determine if a written policy existed. In the end, whether the policies and procedures were written or unwritten, the practice of creating segregated recreational facilities was, in fact, officially sanctioned and this is the information that the NPS is motivated and committed to bring to light.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 79.

## **CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 *NPS: Baseline Contextual Study***

An historical approach through archival research was employed to review primary sources, the records of the NPS, located at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland that identified documents evidencing the policies and practices utilized by the NPS in the development, construction, and operation of Southern parks/sites during the Jim Crow and modern Civil Rights eras. An examination of those sources was completed which resulted in a baseline contextual study that delineates the succession of events relating to this topic.

### **3.2 *Blue Ridge Parkway: Case Study***

Based on the baseline contextual study, subsequent archival research was performed at the Parkway Archives located in Asheville, North Carolina that identified the documents evidencing the implementation of these policies and practices during the Parkway's development, construction, and operation. An analysis and evaluation of these resources was completed for two purposes: (i) to identify those that contain information impacting historical significance in the management documents of the Parkway, and (ii) those that provide details that could be assimilated into the interpretative narrative of the Parkway.

### **3.3 *Blue Ridge Parkway: Interviews***

Based on the information collected from the above-referenced studies, interviews were then conducted of individuals having knowledge of the Parkway and the historic interpretations that have been offered to its visitors over time. The purpose of these interviews was to aid in determining the recommendations to be made to the NPS about the inclusion of this segregation history in its management documents and/or interpretive narrative for the Parkway.

### **3.4. *Justification and Limitations of Approach***

This baseline contextual study is not interpretive from a standpoint of theoretical cause and effect nor does it assign explicit meaning to the history of spatial segregation policies and practices of the NPS. It is, however, a significant descriptive chronicle based on a comprehensive assessment of primary documents reviewed to ascertain facts and the sequence of events that contributed to this history. In addition, this baseline contextual study served to lay a foundation for the case study of the Parkway that analyzed and evaluated how the segregation policies and practices of the NPS affected its design, construction, and operation. That case study contributed to an understanding of the issues and the subsequent quality of the interviews conducted. These interviews facilitated an understanding of what

historical interpretations have been typically relayed to Parkway visitors over time and how the history of spatial segregation could be integrated into the historic narrative. In combination, this approach served to uncover the documentation relating to this topic and contribute to filling in some gaps in scholarship.

The results of this thesis foster the preservation of an important history that might otherwise be forgotten over time. And further, this study could aid the NPS in satisfying its goal to bring the history of segregation in its Southern parks/sites to light, contribute to attracting new and diverse visitors to NPS sites, and provide NPS visitors with an opportunity to make meaningful modern-day connections between this history and current events.

## **CHAPTER 4: NPS STUDY – SEGREGATION PRACTICES AND POLICIES RE SOUTHERN PARKS**

### **4.1 *Results and Findings***

#### **NPS Evolution of Policy: Segregation/Non-Segregation**

What was the policy with regard to the segregation of races circa 1930 when many parks and sites were established or battlefields and monuments were transferred to the NPS in the Southern region of the country? Evidence points to the fact that the NPS operated under Jim Crow custom and/or law in those states where such statutes had been enacted. And it appeared that the NPS struggled with what was practice or policy for several decades not only at its sites in these states, but also where recreational areas and states parks were organized under its direct influence.

Due to conformity to Southern behavior and compliance with Jim Crow laws, the segregation of races would be practiced at Southern sites in several ways. In the first instance, segregation would include the complete exclusion of African Americans. Secondly, if use was permitted, then allocation of space for each race would be specified at a site or within a facility. Lastly, a complete separation of races would be accomplished through the construction of areas for the exclusive use of African Americans as seen at Lewis Mountain in Shenandoah. Yet in the development of facilities for this distinct use, disparity was prevalent regarding the number

of areas designated or the inequitable quality of those allocated.

It should be noted that by the time the NPS provided a “segregation” policy for the development and management of its Southern sites, in the debate over that policy, it was often referred to as one promoting the “desegregation” of sites and facilities. This confusion existed due to the fact that through the 1930s and into the 1940s, the concept of segregation was most often tied to the prohibition of use by African Americans at sites entirely. Therefore, segregation in the form of barred or limited access to NPS sites was the unwritten policy until the establishment of a “non-segregation” policy in 1939 that instigated the promotion of both separate and joint use at sites and facilities in the Southern region. This policy, although questioned and debated for decades, remained in effect through much of the 1940s, lingered into the 1950s and 1960s until the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that mandated complete desegregation.

#### **NPS: Recreational Demonstration Projects and State Recreational Areas**

In a memorandum dated October 1, 1936, written by Associate Director Demaray to Director Cammerer, evidence clearly indicates that the NPS dealt with the issue of the legality of the segregation of races at facilities not only at its National Park sites, but also at locations

connected to Recreational Demonstration Area (RDA) projects.<sup>65</sup> The RDA program was instituted in 1933 under the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works whereby the federal government was “actively engaged in cooperating with the states and their subdivisions in the selection, acquisition, development and administration of outdoor recreation areas.”<sup>66</sup> This endeavor resulted in the cooperation between the Department of the Interior, the NPS, the Resettlement Administration, and the Civilian Conservation Corps and progress was made in developing, increasing, and improving national, state, county, and metropolitan park sites. One reason for the genesis of the RDA program was due to the fact that in the 1930s all levels of government came “to realize that providing outdoor recreational facilities for the use and enjoyment of all people” had become a “major public responsibility” that warranted the cooperative effort between federal, state, and local governmental agencies to satisfy public needs.<sup>67</sup>

Under the RDA program, beyond the parks and sites, additional areas were developed for organized camping that focused on the “needs of all classes” in the larger and “more

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<sup>65</sup>Demaray to Cammerer, Memorandum, October 1, 1936, National Archives, College Park, Maryland (hereinafter NARA), RG 79, Box 017, Recreational Demonstration Areas Program Files, 1934-1947, General to General.

<sup>66</sup> National Park Service, Recreational Demonstration Projects as Illustrated by Chopawamsic, Virginia, <https://www.nps.gov/prwi/learn/historyculture/upload/1936%20report.pdf> (accessed March 17, 2017).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

congested population centers.”<sup>68</sup> These campsite RDA projects were administered by the NPS and managed and maintained by a state or municipal park authority in conjunction with an operating agency, in some cases one interested in camps for underprivileged youth, like the YMCA, for example.<sup>69</sup> Associate Director Demaray wrote that historically both Whites and African Americans needed such campsites, but that in the recent past there had been a requirement imposed to prove demand for such projects by “Negroes,” yet that a proof-of-need standard was not required for camps organized for Whites only. As a result, Associate Director Demaray stated the RDA “efforts so far have been directed toward providing facilities for White persons” exhibiting segregation in the form of exclusion.<sup>70</sup> Confirming this data in an attachment to the 1937 edition of the RDA Administrative Manual is a status chart enumerating the existing RDAs at the time presenting that only one RDA campsite was completed for use by African Americans. That sole camp, known as Lake Murray, was located in Oklahoma and was designated as “Colored” on the list along with the other 34 existing RDA campsites.<sup>71</sup>

It appears that in 1936, Assistant Director Wirth was also interested in discovering more

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Demaray to Cammerer, Memorandum, October 1, 1936, NARA, RG 79, Box 017, Recreational Demonstration Areas Program Files, 1934-1947, General to General.

<sup>71</sup> National Park Service, Administrative Manual for Recreational Demonstration Areas, April 19, 1937, NARA, RG 79, Box 014, Recreational Demonstration Areas Program Files, 1934 – 1947, General to General.

about existing RDAs and requested from his NPS staff that a report on these projects be prepared and keyed to reflect those locations that could be “turned over wholly to Colored group camps” for organizational camping and those that could be used for “both Colored and White group camps.”<sup>72</sup> Assistant Director Wirth, in this request, also made reference to the proposed Chopawamsic RDA and its 12,000 acres of acquired land in Virginia indicating that “I believe a few of those acres could be set aside for a Colored group camp” since at the time, the Lake Murray camp site was the only project that provided for African American use.<sup>73</sup> Director Cammerer, not inclined to support equality between races, had been vocal about the development of RDAs, specifically campsites, for African Americans and continued to inform both Associate Director Demaray and Assistant Director Wirth that with regard to RDA recreational facilities for “Negroes,” there would be no development of camps until funds were located and secured and that a “proven demand” for their need existed.<sup>74</sup> Even with the programs in place to create separate facilities for African Americans, not all individuals working within the NPS were cooperating, instead some chose to support complete exclusion based on

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<sup>72</sup> Wirth to Simmons, Memorandum, September 21, 1936, NARA, RG 79, Box 017, Recreational Demonstration Areas Program Files, 1934-1947, General to General.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Cammerer to Demaray and Wirth, Memorandum, September 30, 1936, NARA RG 79, Box 017, Recreational Demonstration Areas Program Files, 1934-1947, General to General.

what could be viewed as sound fiscal logic, i.e. requiring a proof of need before spending the money on sites for use by African Americans. However, this created a paradoxical situation for African Americans because without access to the facilities, they were unable to show that they would utilize them, hence failing to satisfy the proof of need.

Associate Director Demaray, known to be a bit more progressive in his views on racial equality, continued to seek more information on RDAs at the request of Secretary Ickes and provided a list of projects that had “possibilities for the development of Negro camping facilities.”<sup>75</sup> In his report to Secretary Ickes, Associate Director Demaray grouped the RDAs into four broad categories with those suggested for White use only, those suggested for joint use, those suggested for exclusive use either way, and then named the only one planned for use by both races, that being the Lake Murray site. Associate Director Demaray warned Secretary Ickes that the use suggestions for these projects were based on topography at the sites and not “upon local opinions with which we are not now fully acquainted.” He suggested that additional field studies be completed through a cooperative effort between the NPS and Secretary Ickes’ office with “a representative of your office, who is familiar with the requirements of the Negro race, and one of our field representatives” designated to complete

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<sup>75</sup> Demaray to Ickes, Memorandum, September 30, 1936, NARA, RG 79, Box 017, Recreational Demonstration Areas Program Files, 1934-1947, General to General.

the task. Associate Director Demaray's attitude was positive in tone when dealing with Secretary Ickes and he indicated that once selections were made for African American campsites, development could progress at a rapid pace, clearly not echoing the concerns of Director Cammerer in that funding and proof of demand would be roadblocks. Yet Associate Director Demaray seemed to understand that local approval had the potential to be an impediment.<sup>76</sup>

Because of this information gathering, Associate Director Demaray recommended to Director Cammerer that Secretary Ickes promote a change in the proof-of-need requirement for the development of African American camp sites and "that provisions be made for the Negroes." To illustrate his point, he likened the lack of RDA camp sites to potential situations that might occur at NPS parks:

Regarding facilities for Negroes in National Parks, up to the present time this has been kept on the basis of individual needs and probably at first there will be a few Negroes who will visit the Shenandoah and the Great Smoky Mountains National Parks, and who will want campground facilities. However, if one comes to the Park he cannot be denied such facilities and he will either have to be placed in the camp ground where White persons are camping or there must be available a separate camping area for Negroes with facilities equally as good as for White persons. I do not see how this can be avoided."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Demaray to Cammerer, Memorandum, October 1, 1936, NARA, RG 79, Box 017, Recreational Demonstration Areas Program Files, 1934-1947, General to General.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

It was at this time that Associate Director Demaray promoted his belief that if the campsites were built, then the African American community would use them, thereby eliminating the question of demand and justifying the expenditures.

Beyond the acquisition of lands, attainment of financial resources, and proving need, obtaining local approval was the next obstacle that could block the establishment of camp sites for African Americans. During this period, circa 1936-37, the SOI Office was engaged in reconnaissance and research relating to the issue of racial segregation as it affected RDAs in Southern states and had sent its own personnel to investigate their development. In a letter to the NPS Branch of Recreational Planning, Herbert Evison, the Regional Director of NPS Region One (which at that time included of the Southern states of Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia as well as the District of Columbia), revealed that he and his office wanted to cooperate in “handling the problem of providing recreational facilities for Negroes” but desired to be in charge of this effort in Region One, managing it from the Richmond, Virginia headquarters versus in conjunction with the SOI Office out of Washington.<sup>78</sup> Evison warned that “Sending Negroes into the south on missions such as that recently undertaken by Dewey Jones, of the Secretary’s Office, is . . . always fraught with possibilities of

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<sup>78</sup> Evison to National Park Service, Branch of Recreational Planning, Letter, March 31, 1937, NARA, RG 79, Box 017, Recreational Demonstration Areas Program Files, 1934-1947, General to General.

trouble and disturbance.” He further expressed concern that “the matter of promoting recreational facilities for Negroes should be left to the Region One Office and its field staff,” clearly indicating his desire to retain complete control over these circumstances.<sup>79</sup> In his correspondence, Evison also provided specifics on the lack of progress in negotiations between the NPS and local advisory committees for several proposed RDAs planned in Virginia that would include camps for both Whites and African Americans. He emphasized that approval for these projects required finesse in order to gain that local support and that his office was seeking the endorsement of the respective advisory committees for their development.

The first example related to the Chopawamsic RDA wherein Evison specified that backing for the project would only be secured if a portion of land at this site was permanently designated as a Negro facility, and once accomplished, this separate area would need to undergo a name change to differentiate it completely from the Chopawamsic RDA, stating that in doing so, there would be no confusion as to use.

Evison also reported difficulty in getting an RDA known as Swift Creek sanctioned in the Richmond/Petersburg/Hopewell vicinity by the local advisory committee as well. He advocated that if the proposed name-change solution he suggested for the Chopawamsic RDA was found

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

acceptable, then he would propose a similar scenario to those involved in the decision-making for the Swift Creek site. Evison emphasized that this might be the best approach due to the fact that “representatives of the Swift Creek Committee have expressed themselves in the past as opposed to devoting any area to Negro use.”<sup>80</sup> He also offered one further thought relating to the site chosen for the African American camp and put forward that it should be “on a completely different watershed from the main area and the main entrance to it can [could] undoubtedly be provided from along its Southern boundary,” trusting that this factor would aid in gaining approval for the project from the local advisory committee.”<sup>81</sup>

Through Evison’s actions and words, it was clear that the Region One office understood and conformed to Jim Crow segregation laws and succumbed to Southern custom. However, in the Washington office views of NPS personnel appeared to be more progressive. Early in 1938, Assistant Director Wirth wrote to Evison specifically referencing the Swift Creek RDA and put the onus on he and his Region One staff to push forward to gain local approval by requesting that they form and become members of a subcommittee to represent the NPS in a devoted effort to advance the project. Assistant Director Wirth indicated that the lack of desire “to meet the acute needs for Negro recreational facilities in the vicinity” could not possibly be the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

sentiment of all citizens in the area. Hence the reason for a subcommittee, as it afforded the NPS an opportunity to aid in the selection of its members that would include prominent citizens with more educated opinions. Assistant Director Wirth's closing paragraph is telling from a standpoint of understanding attitudes existing in Virginia at that time, "It is our feeling that one must give consideration to local custom and sentiment in the south if we are going to be able to contribute to the solution of the problems of providing recreational areas for Negroes."<sup>82</sup>

Despite the laws not specifically mandating the exclusion of African Americans from a right to exclusive facilities, the mechanics of getting those facilities planned, funded, and developed often remained in the hands of local authorities. These individuals and/or groups held the power to obstruct progress by withholding approval for such sites. And for those sanctioned, the endorsement often came only if the facilities were completely autonomous in location and identification.

Evison also gathered data on the establishment and operation of recreational areas in general in Region One to determine whether they conformed to Jim Crow laws as adopted by individual states. The results of that analysis were provided to him in May of 1937 by R. C. Robinson, a Recreation Planner for the NPS, who confirmed that all recreational areas in

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<sup>82</sup> Wirth to Evison, Letter, January 21, 1938, NARA, RG 79, Box 017, Recreational Demonstration Areas Program Files, 1934-1947, General to General.

Southern states conformed to race segregation laws adopted by the respective state. And, conversely, in states void of race segregation laws, Robinson revealed that “Negroes are permitted to use all areas. It has, therefore, not been the policy to provide separate and distinct areas for their activities.” Included in the group of states with race segregation laws were Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia where Robinson determined that “the Negro is not permitted to use parks developed for the use of the White race, with the exception of those located in Washington and administered by National Capital Parks.” Although Robinson mentioned policy, at this time, efforts to create recreational areas in Southern regions adhered to local custom and law without evidence of a written policy.

Robinson’s report also described a general lack of recreational sites in Region One that could be used by African Americans which he attributed primarily to the lack of public support as opposed to the availability of land or funds:

The writer would like to point out that the Resettlement Administration has acquired large sub-marginal areas throughout this group of states. Much of this land lies in, or near, densely populated Negro sections and will provide the acreage necessary for developing the much needed recreational facilities for Negro use. It should be noted, also, that these States with race segregation laws provide few or no recreational opportunities for the large Negro population.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Evison to Robinson, Memorandum, May 4, 1937, NARA RG 79, Box 017, Recreational Demonstration Areas Program Files, 1934-1947, General to General.

As a result of this analysis, Robinson predicted that “without substantial federal encouragement” proposals to provide for African American facilities in the Southern states located in Region One were doubtful.<sup>84</sup> For clarification, much of the land described as sub-marginal by Robinson came to the NPS through the Resettlement Administration and were those lands acceptable for use as recreational parks. They were only referred to as sub-marginal due to the fact that they were not satisfactory or adequate for agricultural purposes and not sub-marginal from a standpoint of quality regarding RDA projects planned for White or African American citizens.

Although segregation issues affecting the creation of RDAs and campsites in the Southern regions in the 1930s tended to be governed by local law and custom, the administrative documents regulating their planning and establishment did not specifically address the issue. In other jurisdictional matters, however, the Administrative Manual for RDAs favored the laws of individual states:

The project managers will be responsible for the enforcement of the regulations within the boundaries of their respective areas and for the enforcement of such federal statutes for the protection of Government property generally, as are properly applicable to the recreational demonstration areas. Since, however, none of the recreational demonstration areas are under the exclusive jurisdiction of the United States, the State

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

laws are in full force and effect.<sup>85</sup>

The NPS was also involved in the planning of state recreational areas during the 1930s and contributed vast resources to various agencies of individual states in cooperative efforts that culminated in extensive planning reports that were recommended by and required the concurrence of the NPS. Reports from the mid-1930s substantiate that recreational developments planned in Southern states followed Jim Crow laws that entailed the complete separation of African Americans and Whites in the state park systems. In a Report on Park, Parkway, and Recreational-Area Study prepared in March of 1938 by the Tennessee State Planning Commission (Tennessee Report) and in a similar report prepared by the North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development in 1940 (North Carolina Report), there are references to the specific recreational needs of both Whites and African Americans residing in those states based on demographics, population centers, and existing facilities provided for use by either group.<sup>86</sup> According to the Tennessee Report, the size and location of sites was

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<sup>85</sup> National Park Service, Administrative Manual for Recreational Demonstration Areas, April 19, 1937, NARA, RG 79, Box 014, Recreational Demonstration Areas Program Files, 1935 – 1947, General to General.

<sup>86</sup> Tennessee State Planning Commission and Department of Conservation in Cooperation with the National Park Service, "Park, Parkway, and Recreational-Area Study of Tennessee, a Tentative Final Report, March 15, 1938" and North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development and the North Carolina State Planning Board in Cooperation with United States Department of Interior National Park Service, "Park, Parkway, and Recreational-Area Study, December 1940," Blue Ridge Parkway Archives (hereinafter BLRI Archives), RG 7, Series 41, Box 57, Folder 15.

determined through general principles fundamental to sound planning with one such principle confirming the creation of segregated parks:

The principle that areas should be located and designed to meet the needs of the citizens has been accepted as fundamental to a comprehensive plan. This necessitates two areal systems, one for White people and one for Negroes. It further necessitates the location of areas near where the people live, if the lower income groups are to be served, since it is self-evident that the economic status of such groups prevents their traveling very far in search of recreation.<sup>87</sup>

As part of the necessity to create separate facilities for African Americans and Whites, population was denoted to be the determining factor so that new facilities could be developed proportionately. In Tennessee, as of the date of the report, there were 500,000 African Americans living there comprising nearly 18% of its total population with virtually no recreational facilities available for their use. The Tennessee Report concluded that the needs of African Americans had not been met in any way. Yet sites maintained or under development for the exclusive use of Whites were determined to be sufficient with the report revealing that Whites had been adequately served across the entire state.<sup>88</sup> Based on the population of African Americans in the state and the absence of facilities for their use, it was proposed that four recreational areas be developed. These facilities were intended to meet the needs of not

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<sup>87</sup> Tennessee State Planning Commission, et al., 54.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 69.

only those living in cities like Memphis and Nashville, but also in rural areas to accommodate African Americans living across the state. And even though the findings detailed significant disparity in facilities based on race, three additional locations were proposed for the exclusive use of Whites as well.

Again, as seen in the Tennessee Report, segregation in the form of the separation of races was accepted practice in the south, which under Jim Crow law was permitted as long as parks and facilities were deemed equal. But in the recommendations made for the new parks for both African Americans and Whites in these separate areal systems, there were some distinctions as to the type of amenities to be provided. In the parks designated for African American use, the Tennessee Report states, due to the cost factor, that “golf, horseback riding and other activities with restricted appeal should be given a low priority if provided at all” and further recommends that these parks instead be designed to focus on large-group activities and should include ball fields, picnic areas, and boating areas. However, the Tennessee Report reiterates that when establishing the acreage needs to accommodate these activities, that size should be determined with “the same standards set forth for the White race.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 71.

The Tennessee Report contained recommendations for the development of a total of seven parks without a sequence of priority and stated that various factors could “regulate to a large extent the actual order of acquisition and development” including the “availability of lands and of funds, local demand and cooperation, and other related factors.” As seen with the development of RDAs, concerns such as these clearly could impede progress in creating facilities to service the African American community.<sup>90</sup>

Like the Tennessee Report, the North Carolina Report provided demographic data that revealed growth of the African American population in that state and that the recreational needs of African Americans in North Carolina were characterized as “grossly underserved,” especially throughout the rural regions where eighty percent of the African American population lived:

. . . where almost the only recreational opportunities are to be found, if found at all, in hunting or fishing or in social gatherings centered in the church or the school. Experience has shown that wherever the opportunity is presented, the Negro will make full and frequent use of all facilities for recreation. It seems therefore inescapable that in these centers of large Negro populations, whether in the Piedmont cities or the Coastal Plan farming centers, provision must be made for a separate system of recreational developments for Negro use.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>91</sup> North Carolina Department of Conservation, et al., 47.

Recommendations were made that lands be acquired across the state and along the coastline with a focus on scenic value to resolve “glaring deficiencies in recreational facilities for the Negro population.”<sup>92</sup>

As part of both reports, the locations of all existing NPS sites, RDAs, National Forest areas, and state parks situated within each state were provided. The NPS contributed information relating to its national parks and sites with detailed data as to size, improvements, demographics of the nearby population centers, attendance, and the amenities available broken down by their availability for use by Whites and/or African Americans. This material confirmed the disparities caused by segregation practices that resulted in the complete lack of facilities or the disproportionate availability of amenities for use by African Americans. It is clear that the NPS operated in compliance with Jim Crow laws, but it pushed for the creation of separate-but-equal facilities as indicated in these reports. However, the hurdles described as to land acquisition, financing, proof of need, and local approval often made these efforts more idealistic than realistic.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

## **NPS: Lack of Facilities**

Beyond reports like those described above, information pertaining to a lack of facilities or the lack of quality recreational facilities for African Americans during the 1930s is abundant and reflected in communication directed to the NPS from private citizens, organizations, and government officials. The controversy over facilities sparked by complaints often highlighted the absence of a clear policy at the NPS. Regardless of the specifics contained in the correspondence as to how facilities were segregated, not segregated, or completely separated, the responses to these outside inquiries delivered by representatives of the NPS were often similarly vague and non-committal in character with regard to policy.

In a letter written on May 13, 1937, to Assistant Director Wirth by the Secretary of the Memphis Branch of the NAACP, Grace T. Hamilton provided resolutions approved by that organization's membership requesting that separate facilities be developed at Shelby Forest Recreation Area for "Negro use" due to the overall lack of quality facilities for African Americans in the Memphis, Tennessee area. Hamilton also requested in her appeal to Assistant Director Wirth that the NPS provide African Americans an opportunity to sit on the local advisory committee charged with the planning of the Shelby Forest project and suggested that the committee be more reflective of the significant African American population in the

Memphis area, which at that time was close to 40% of the total population.<sup>93</sup> Assistant Director Wirth acknowledged Hamilton's letter on June 15, 1937, and implied that the NPS could only assist her in this situation by asking that its regional officer bring the matter to the attention of the Tennessee authorities. He recommended that Hamilton contact the powers in the state responsible for developing and administering the Shelby Forest RDA about all concerns of the NAACP expressed in her letter. Assistant Director Wirth provided the relevant contact information to Hamilton and closed his communication by assuring her and the members of the NAACP "that this Service is fully aware of the need for recreational facilities for Negroes and that it will do everything within its power to help to meet them."<sup>94</sup> It is difficult to say what Assistant Director Wirth was referencing in his reply to Hamilton, but it is indicative of the type of nebulous response offered by the NPS to inquiries for equitable facilities during this time period.

Others pushed to resolve the lack of facilities for African American use issue at Shelby Forest and in doing so managed to solidify the sentiment to adhere to Jim Crow law and the custom to segregate races. In a letter penned by E. W. Hale, the Chairman of the Shelby County

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<sup>93</sup> Hamilton to Wirth, Letter, May 13, 1937, NARA, RG 79, Box 017, Recreational Demonstration Areas Program File, 1934-1947, General to General.

<sup>94</sup> Wirth to Hamilton, Letter, June 15, 1937, NARA, RG 79, Box 017, Recreational Demonstration Areas Program Files, 1934-1947, General to General.

Commissioners, addressed to Eleanor Roosevelt, Hale requested the assistance of Mrs. Roosevelt in convincing the NPS to aid the county in establishing a “proposed Negro park.” Hale further suggested that this park be located outside the confines of Shelby Forest Park and wrote “The population of Shelby County, including the City of Memphis is around forty per cent Colored and we do not think it would be wise to mix the two races in what is now known as the Shelby Forest Park, in fact, neither the White nor Colored people want this.” He proposed an alternate site which was described as “...a certain section of this county that would be very acceptable to the Colored people -- it being four or five miles from the city limits and is in the Negro section, therefore, there would be no complaint from citizens in that community if such a park is established.” It is worth noted that Hale provided Mrs. Roosevelt with the details of Shelby County’s financial contribution to the project, wherein he indicated that it had not “supplemented the price of the lands for Shelby Forest Park,” but it would be “willing to purchase lands for the Shelby County Colored park, provided, of course, that the National Park Service will come forward and do its part.”<sup>95</sup> Although not addressed or officially carbon copied to the NPS, this letter made its way to the NPS general files, but there is no evidence of an official response. Hale’s act of writing this letter indicates that segregation, in the form of

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<sup>95</sup> Hale to Eleanor Roosevelt, Letter, November 25, 1937, NARA, RG 79, Box 017, Recreational Demonstration Areas Program Files, 1934-1947, General to General.

complete separation of races, was so entrenched in Southern states that bringing this matter so candidly forward to the wife of the President was deemed appropriate by this commissioner. Likewise, Hale's blatant mention of potential funding by the county if a separate park was planned indicates how determined some politicians in the south were to support Jim Crow custom and law.

Others reported on incongruities to the NPS as well. The Washington Council of the National Negro Congress, in a Public Recreation Report dated July of 1939, supplied the NPS with the results of a survey it conducted on public recreation facilities available for use by African Americans in the District of Columbia. That report not only signified inadequacy in the number of facilities available, primarily due to a lack of playgrounds in general, but also disparity resulting from a lack of amenities in those that did exist. The report concluded with a plea end to racial discrimination by governmental agencies such as the NPS.<sup>96</sup>

As seen, although programs had been established by the NPS to develop recreational areas at the state and local level throughout the Southern region for both African Americans and Whites, there continued to be inconsistencies in those efforts due to compliance to

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<sup>96</sup> Washington Council of the National Negro Congress, Public Recreation Report, July 31, 1939, NARA, RG 79, Box 2827, Central Classified File, National Capital Park, 601-601.01.2.

Southern custom and law. Not only were facilities non-existent for African Americans in some locales, in places where they did exist, they were inequitable from a standpoint of size, location, and/or amenities. However, there were those at the NPS who attempted to make inroads to establish more equitable procedures based on federal law, and as the segregation issue continued to emerge in the planning of parks and recreation areas on the state and local level, the NPS was also forced to deal with it at its national sites.

### **NPS: National Park Sites**

Controversy over segregation practices came to the forefront in 1939 when policy and procedure was deemed mandatory to assist in the design, management, and operation of NPS sites in the Southern states. Correspondence was exchanged between executive members of the SOI Office, its legal team, the NPS, legislators, and private citizens concerning protests against the segregation practices of the NPS in the operation of its Southern parks and sites due primarily to the events that occurred at Shenandoah. Many memos were issued from the Office of Solicitor for the Department of the Interior whose members provided Secretary Ickes with legal opinions on the subject of racial segregation in an attempt to clarify whether federal or state laws prevailed pertaining to the use of facilities by African Americans in those states where Jim Crow laws were in effect.

In a memorandum prepared at the request of and directed to Solicitor Nathan R. Margold and dated January 12, 1939, staff attorney Phineas Indritz presented research about segregation in the Southern parks specifically relating to activities at Shenandoah. The issues addressed by Indritz included the provisions made for African Americans at Lewis Mountain, the distribution of brochures designating the locations of “Negro” facilities, the determination that Lewis Mountain was viewed as an inferior site compared to areas designed for use by White visitors, and the fact that there were no comfort facilities for African American men and women to use separately, but only those for “Colored” to share.<sup>97</sup>

Indritz prefaced his legal analysis with a statement that the existing segregation practices at Shenandoah were considered NPS policy:

Shenandoah National Park, located within the boundaries of the State of Virginia, under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Federal Government of the United States, and administered by the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior, was set aside by Congress as a national park area for the benefit of the entire people of the United States. The State of Virginia, however, maintains a policy of segregation of the White and Negro races. This Virginia policy has been adopted and is now being practiced at present within the Shenandoah National park by the National Park Service.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Indritz to Margold, Memorandum, January 12, 1939, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 1).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

Beyond this, Indritz expressed his personal impression that Director Demaray remained “vague” about taking a stand on the segregation issue and provided Solicitor Margold with quoted material from correspondence written by Director Demaray to support his claim. That excerpted information revealed that in Director Demaray’s view, the NPS had satisfactorily dealt with prior complaints and protests at Shenandoah and was focused on the provision of facilities for “the complete enjoyment of the park equally by all alike.” To this end, Demaray asserted that the NPS was handling the segregation issue by creating separate facilities at the park for Whites and African Americans, yet was limiting that development “to conform with the generally accepted customs long established in Virginia.”<sup>99</sup> Not only is this information enlightening from a standpoint of presenting Indritz’s view as to Director Demaray’s stance, but it is also telling that those working for and with the NPS at this time were not clear if segregation practices were the result of conformity to Southern custom, adherence to state law, or whether an official policy was even in place.

In viewing segregation at Shenandoah as policy, Indritz provided research on whether jurisdiction for this policy was based in federal law or Virginia law:

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

Discrimination against the Negro on racial grounds has long been present in the United States. But a sharp distinction ought to be drawn between racial discrimination by private individuals and racial discrimination by the Federal Government. That segregation of the races is practiced by some of the Southern states does not compel the United States to follow suit. The Shenandoah National Park is not maintained by funds of the State of Virginia but by Congressional appropriations derived from the taxation of all the people of the United States. Nor are Virginians the only visitors to the Shenandoah National Park. People from every part of the United States come to visit the majestic beauties of the national parks. To enforce Virginia policy upon non-Virginians, in a territory which does not belong to Virginia, which is under the exclusive jurisdiction of the United States Government, and which is maintained by the funds of all the citizens of the United States, is questionable policy.<sup>100</sup>

Going further, based on his review of the Virginia Acts of Assembly and the Acts of the United States Congress, Indritz suggested that federal law took precedence over state law:

Whether the United States Government should continue to follow this Virginia policy in the Shenandoah National Park or should modify the extent of segregation and discrimination or should abandon it entirely must, however, be critically examined with reference not only to the spirit of our democracy but also with regard to the legality of a non-segregation policy and to the possibilities of the practical operation of such a policy. . . . All laws applicable to places under sole and exclusive jurisdiction of the United States shall have force and effect in said park . . . Even though the state of Virginia has positive laws requiring the segregation of races, those laws would not be effective within an area under the exclusive jurisdiction of the United States Government.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

He also stipulated to Solicitor Margold that the SOI had the authority to make and publish policies and provided the Act of Congress that delegated that power.

Based on this legal analysis, Indritz made a recommendation for what he termed a change of “policy” and stated that there should be no discrimination practices by the federal government nor any permitted at the hands of its contractors at NPS sites. He also relayed how contracts written prior to a policy change of this kind, like those in place at Shenandoah for concessions, could be amended without the contractor’s approval as the existing contracts in force, as agreed to by operators and concessionaires, provided for the acceptance of any policy change determined by the SOI. Indritz reiterated that the SOI had the authority to “effectuate” the non-segregation policy and force a modification to the existing contracts to be sure that operators and/or concessionaires complied.<sup>102</sup> At the time of the writing of his memo, the boilerplate contracts for concessions did not include a non-segregation clause, but only touched upon the duties of the contractor in providing services to the public stating, “Officers and employees will observe a strict and consistent impartiality as to rates, services, and in all other respects, and that they will under the circumstances exercise courtesy and consideration in their relations to the public.” This provision, in application, actually allowed contractors to

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

segregate areas of use at their facilities.<sup>103</sup> Indritz focused attention on the contractual details due to the fact that at Shenandoah, the master concessionaire had already expressed that it was not amenable to any movement toward desegregation.

After providing information on his review of the relevant statutes and the effect of a policy change on contractual commitments, Indritz closed with this opinion and recommendation:

The sooner the segregation policy is abandoned, the easier it will be to abandon it. The least that can be done is to see that with regard to new facilities no elements of segregation or discrimination creep in. Once segregation is established in any service or accommodation, it may become increasingly difficult to eradicate it. It is my recommendation, therefore, that the present policy of the National Park Service with regard to segregation and discrimination between the White and Colored races be completely abandoned.<sup>104</sup>

Based on Indritz' memorandum, Solicitor Margold furnished his opinion about NPS segregation practices at Shenandoah to Secretary Ickes. Secretary Ickes had also requested that Solicitor Margold comment on a draft of a letter prepared by the NPS in response to the complaints at Shenandoah. Included with the memo, Solicitor Margold provided his own draft

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<sup>103</sup> National Park Service, Form of Concessions Contract (Bid Documents), NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 1).

<sup>104</sup> Indritz to Margold, Memorandum, January 12, 1939.

letter addressed to the complainant for review and relayed that he was “unable to subscribe to the doctrine that segregation should be continued, as stated in the letter prepared in the National Park Service,” and Margold stated specifically in his draft that “segregation of the races in Shenandoah will be discontinued.”<sup>105</sup> This action by Margold signifies that he believed in the likelihood that a new policy was being considered and was one that mandated that the NPS operate pursuant federal law at its parks and sites in the Southern region.

Further, Solicitor Margold’s memorandum argued against segregation and stipulated that the separation of facilities for use by Whites and African Americans was legal, but he noted that it was only true if all facilities were equal. He proceeded to inform Secretary Ickes that at Shenandoah it had been determined by a member of his staff that the facilities were not equal, therefore the “separate-but-equal” practice problematic. Solicitor Margold included this discovery even though that claim had been countered by J.R. Lassiter, the Superintendent of Shenandoah. Lassiter refuted that the remarks made by a “member of the Solicitor’s Office” about the inferior facilities located at Lewis Mountain were not accurate, yet he admitted that the Lewis Mountain facilities were smaller than those constructed for use by White visitors to

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<sup>105</sup> Margold to Ickes, Memorandum, January 17, 1939, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 1).

the park. Interestingly, Lassiter justified the inequality in size by using the “proof-of-need” argument, stating “it is not felt that facilities of equal size should be provided for a group which constitutes less than one percent of our total visitors.”<sup>106</sup>

To assist Secretary Ickes in understanding the legalities, Solicitor Margold elaborated on matters of law versus matters of policy. From a legal standpoint, Solicitor Margold wrote:

The United States has exclusive jurisdiction over the Park and, in its management of that Park, is not bound by either laws or customs of the State of Virginia. Likewise, it would be legal and proper under existing concession contracts to require, by appropriate rule or regulation, that park operations remove all traces of race segregation . . . In considering the problem of segregation from a policy standpoint, I have advised with various leaders of thought in such matters including the Department’s Advisor on Negro Affairs [Trent]. After full consideration of all phases of this matter, I have concluded that there is no justification for the continuation of the practice of segregation even if present operations in the Park should be altered in such a way as to remove the discriminatory factor which now exists. The Park is maintained from public funds for the benefit of the public generally and, in those circumstances, I can see no possible justification for segregating various elements of the public. That conclusion is, of course, further fortified by the commendable efforts on the part of the present Administration to obviate racial lines.<sup>107</sup>

Solicitor Margold closed by stating that the issue of segregation had been thoroughly investigated by his staff and that Secretary Ickes should consult with his “people at the NPS”

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<sup>106</sup> Lassiter to Director, Memorandum, February 8, 1939, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 1).

<sup>107</sup> Margold to Ickes, Memorandum, January 17, 1939.

before signing the letter as drafted but also before taking further action.<sup>108</sup> This exchange between Solicitor Margold and Secretary Ickes illustrates that a policy on segregation was under investigation as there continued to be much confusion as to what was law, practice, and/or custom and due to mounting complaints, that issue was being scrutinized on every level of the NPS and through the Office of the SOI to establish a determination of policy.

On a side note, it is noteworthy that the final response letter to Clyde McDuffie, the complainant in this Shenandoah matter, is neither written by nor signed by Secretary Ickes, but rather by his First Assistant, E. K. Burlew. McDuffie in a response to Burlew acknowledged that he was pleased to learn that Secretary Ickes was conducting an investigation and that a policy decision was anticipated. Describing himself as a member of a minority group, McDuffie offered to serve as a consultant to Secretary Ickes in an effort to finalize any NPS policy decisions affecting African Americans.<sup>109</sup>

In reaction to Solicitor Margold's memorandum, Secretary Ickes admonished his office, specifically the memorandum written by Indritz:

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> McDuffie to Burlew, Letter, March 15, 1939, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 1).

The memorandum prepared by Mr. Indritz seems to indicate more zeal than sound discretion. It is an unfortunate document to have prepared for the files of this Department. Apparently Mr. Indritz has yet to learn that an administrative officer cannot abdicate his reason to his sentiments, even if his sentiments are high and noble. My own feeling is that I have succeeded in accomplishing a great deal for the Negroes, or rather in helping them to accomplish a great deal for themselves, by carefully refraining from getting so far in advance of the procession that they become targets and part of the procession.<sup>110</sup>

Secretary Ickes' reputation in dealing with racial issues was viewed as progressive, even though he was slow to make a decision on policy and cautious about what documentation was included in the official files. Not only was he engaged in a thorough investigation of segregation from a legal standpoint, he also took advice from those representing African Americans including the opinions of Advisor Trent. Upon appointment, Secretary Ickes worked diligently to eradicate the existing segregation practices within the Department of Interior which was not surprising considering that the Secretary had once served as the President of the Chicago chapter of the NAACP.<sup>111</sup> The movement to thoroughly investigate the issue of segregation reveals that Secretary Ickes was promoting change and the modification of prevailing practices. For Secretary Ickes, the stakes were extremely high as he, at this time, not only served in the capacity of the Secretary of Interior, but was also the Administrator of the

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<sup>110</sup> Ickes to Margold, Memorandum, January 26, 1939, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 1).

<sup>111</sup> Devlin, 39.

Public Works Administration. And, in either or both of these roles, he certainly would be “unwilling to compromise the President’s [Roosevelt] economic program by pushing further and angering Southern Democrats,” a strong and powerful allegiance of politicians to contend with in the 1930s. Therefore, it is understandable that Secretary Ickes was hesitant to wholly oppose segregation practices in the Southern region without a thorough investigation of the matter.<sup>112</sup>

The exchange between Solicitor Margold and Secretary Ickes continued and in a response memorandum directed to Secretary Ickes dated February 6, 1939, Solicitor Margold offered his thoughts on the form and style of correspondence/memoranda to be written for official SOI department use, suggesting that his opinion differed from that provided by the NPS. He also provided insight as to the existing policy, that of following state segregation laws and the potential to test a non-segregation policy at Shenandoah to see how and if it would be accepted:

I need not repeat the substance of my former memorandum on this subject. It is still my recommendation that the letter and memorandum in the attached file, which I prepared for your signature, should be given careful and favorable consideration. The suggested action, of course, relates only to the Shenandoah National Park and need not be made a general policy applicable in all Park Service areas throughout the south. To try the non-segregation policy in a border Southern State such as Virginia would, in my judgment, be a proper experiment as well as a justified initial step to take in introducing

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 41.

a non-segregation policy into the Southern areas. I believe the step would not be too bold.<sup>113</sup>

Solicitor Margold's suggestion to use Shenandoah as test area due to the fact that it was a border state seemed to make sense, yet in addition, there were potential issues on the rise nearby as the Parkway was being developed with spatially-segregated and completely separate recreational facilities in the plans. Due to its proximity to Shenandoah, and with the Parkway providing the link from Shenandoah through Virginia south into North Carolina and all the way to Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the likelihood of similar complaints from private citizens, organizations, politicians, etc. would, no doubt, be on the horizon.

Although Director Demaray indicated that the NPS was following custom, the attorneys for the SOI referenced the segregation practices as policy. Solicitor Margold clarified that the practices engaged in at Shenandoah resulted from adherence to Virginia law which ultimately manifested into NPS policy. Confirmation of policy was provided by Indritz as well, when he wrote of his own actions in removing a brochure for Shenandoah that demarcated Lewis Mountain as an area for use by African Americans from the official file. He referred specifically to policy and stated:

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<sup>113</sup> Margold to Ickes, Memorandum, February 6, 1939, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 1).

For the purpose of including this guide map as an exhibit with this file pertaining to the question now before the Secretary for decision as to whether the policy of race segregation should be abandoned in Shenandoah National Park, I have removed this guide map from the National Park service file of Shenandoah administration and personnel complaint . . . having made an appropriate notation of such removal at the place whence this guide map was taken.<sup>114</sup>

Both Solicitor Margold and Indritz pronounced that from a legal standpoint, due to the prevalence of federal law, a decision to completely eradicate the existing segregation policy and to enforce a desegregation policy constituted a legitimate policy change.

Despite the opinions of counsel, Secretary Ickes remained reluctant to make a policy change without testing the political waters and he does so with the aid of his First Assistant Secretary Burlew. On March 6, 1939, First Assistant Secretary Burlew sent a letter to United States Senator Glass requesting his opinion, as a legislator from Virginia, with respect to the current segregation practices at Shenandoah, referencing that complaints and “well-formulated protests” had been lodged:

The policy in Shenandoah National Park with regard to segregation of races follows, I believe, that of the State of Virginia. In general the national park policy is to follow state rules, regulations and customs whenever it is not inconsistent with federal law and policy to do so. An instance of this general policy in the administration of the national parks is in the control of alcoholic liquors in accord with State rules, and occasionally

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<sup>114</sup> Indritz to File, Note, February 18, 1939, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 1).

also, in the regulation of fishing. The protests against continuation of racial segregation in Shenandoah National Park have requested elimination of all such segregation and deleting all recognition thereof from maps and regulations issued by the National Park Service . . . From a legal aspect it appears that a policy of segregation would be constitutional provided the facilities for each race are in all respects equal. Conversely the abolition of any policy of segregation is equally constitutional and legal since the United States, having exclusive jurisdiction in the management of the park is not bound by either the laws or customs of Virginia, and under existing contracts, may also require concessionaires to abstain from racial discrimination.<sup>115</sup>

The letter concluded in the following way, “The question concerning the policy to be carried on in this matter is one of great importance and one on which I would appreciate an expression of your considered judgment prior to the making of any final determination.”<sup>116</sup> Based on the opposing legal interpretations provided in the body of this letter, First Assistant Secretary Burlew, too, remained vague and non-committal either way and appeared to be making an innocuous request for clarification, truly testing the waters for Secretary Ickes.<sup>117</sup>

It did not take long for Senator Glass to reply. In a short and to-the-point response letter dated the very next day and written on United States Senate Committee on Appropriations letterhead, for which the Glass was the committee chair, he described the segregation policy as law. “From your letter of March 6<sup>th</sup> it is obvious that you are familiar with

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<sup>115</sup> Burlew to Glass, Letter, March 6, 1939, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 1).

<sup>116</sup> Margold to Ickes, Memorandum, February 6, 1939.

<sup>117</sup> Burlew to Glass, Letter, March 6, 1939.

the segregation laws of the State of Virginia. Of course I completely approve these laws; and if the Interior Department desires to disregard them, either in fact or spirit, it will have to take full responsibility for any such remarkable proceeding.” Glass did not mince words and thus provided valuable information to First Assistant Secretary Burlew, Secretary Ickes, and the NPS. Based on the rapidity of his response and the use of the Appropriations Committee letterhead, for which he served as chair, Glass, one of the most powerful Southern democrats in office at the time, clearly insinuated that the “full responsibility” he referred to in his letter related to any future appropriation of money to the NPS and/or perhaps the Works Progress Administration as well. Attached to the response letter from Glass in the files of the NPS is a handwritten note that reads, “File – no copy left. Matters were handled confidentially and all papers given to Mr. Burlew. JRW 3-13-39.”<sup>118</sup> It clearly was a vexing matter for the NPS, Secretary Ickes, and his staff.

Glass was not the only United States Senator from Virginia asked to provide an opinion on the issue as evidenced by a letter dated March 9, 1939, addressed to First Assistant Secretary Burlew from Senator Harry Flood Byrd. This correspondence was written on United

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<sup>118</sup> Glass to Burlew, Letter, March 7, 1939, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 1).

States Senate Secret Committee on Investigation of Executive Agencies of the Federal Government letterhead for which Byrd was the chair. It is not long and gets directly to the point:

In response to your letter . . . limited to complaints with respect to the matter you mention and would be glad to be advised by you of the source of the complaints and well formulated protests that you state have been made to you with regard to the segregation of Negro visitors in the Shenandoah National Park. When the park was established, it was agreed that all laws governing the State of Virginia would be in effect within park areas.<sup>119</sup>

The letter is not completely accurate, however, as it misstates the facts about jurisdictional issues. Byrd indicated that all laws governing the State of Virginia were in effect at parks like Shenandoah, yet jurisdiction governing issues including gaming/fishing, timber rights, and the sale of alcohol, for example, conformed to federal legislation with matters of civil rights left unaddressed.<sup>120</sup> Nonetheless, the message to Secretary Ickes and the NPS was clear, in Byrd's view Virginia law prevailed at Shenandoah and without specifically stating it in the letter, adherence to Jim Crow practice, therefore, was legal. This is yet another ominous letter written by an even more powerful Southern democrat referencing a federally-sanctioned secret

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<sup>119</sup> Byrd to Burlew, Letter, March 7, 1939, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 1).

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

committee that had the power to investigate an executive agency of the government which would include the Department of Interior, the NPS, and/or the Works Progress Administration.

The rapidity of these responses, the terseness of their contents, and the use of letterhead borne of committees that wielded power over the SOI and the NPS, provides insight into how controversial the issue of segregation was and that the potential ramifications from formidable politicians, like Glass and Byrd, who aided in establishing parks/sites in these Southern regions, could prove detrimental to agencies that relied heavily on the continued support and funding provided by the Federal government. Copies of these letters were immediately provided to Director Demaray by First Assistant Secretary Burlew and within two months of this exchange, a policy on non-segregation at Shenandoah was determined by the NPS.<sup>121</sup>

#### **NPS: Establishment of Non-Segregation Policy**

On April 11, 1939, Thomas C. Vint, the Chief of Planning for the NPS, sent a memorandum to Director Demaray indicating that a meeting was to be held on April 26, 1939 “to review the Negro recreational development” with a recommendation for him to attend due

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<sup>121</sup> Burlew to Demaray, Memorandum, March 9, 1939, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 1).

to the fact that “there are some administrative policies to be determined.”<sup>122</sup> As a result of that meeting, on May 5, 1939, a policy memorandum was written by Director Demaray and submitted to Secretary Ickes for his approval. On May 12, 1939, that memo was approved by Secretary Ickes and concurred to by Advisor Trent, thereby establishing the non-segregation policy of the NPS (NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy).<sup>123</sup>

The NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy specifically referred to the development of sites in Virginia and mandated that “gasoline, service, and eating facilities . . . will in all cases provide for both White and Negro use” in that there would be no division between races at gas or service stations, sandwich shops, lunch counters or in sales rooms, and that dining terraces would also be planned for use by both with little separation. There were, however, provisions delineated that would continue to segregate the two races. If full dining rooms were considered at a facility, then they would be designed to provide separate eating areas for African Americans and Whites. Going further, the policy states, in larger park areas completely “separate cabin, camping, and picnicking areas will be provided for Negro use.” With regard to

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<sup>122</sup> Vint to Demaray, Memorandum, April 11, 1939, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified Files, 1933-1949, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604.

<sup>123</sup> Demaray to Ickes, Memorandum, May 12, 1939, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified Files, 1933-1949, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604.

comfort stations, "... if one building is used for both Negroes and Whites, the sexes of both races will use common entrances. Inside the building separate toilets will be provided for each race. There will be no separation between Whites and Negroes in the installation of urinals and wash basins."<sup>124</sup> The NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy appears to be a compromise, the blending of segregation and non-segregation practices together, perhaps in an effort to placate all parties and/or to pave the way for a complete desegregation policy. The NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy as written and approved did not resolve all issues nor appease all parties as it proved difficult and confusing for the NPS to comply with its terms at all southern locations.

As a result of mingling various forms of prior segregation practices with compliance to the terms of the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy, the NPS continued to receive complaints about segregation practices at Shenandoah for many years. In early 1941, Norma E. Boyd, Chair of the National Council of Negro Women, wrote to First Assistant Secretary Burlew regarding large and garish signs used at the park to denote the facilities to be used by African Americans.<sup>125</sup> At this time with the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy in place, the segregation of rest room facilities was not permitted, yet as Boyd indicated the signage remained. First

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Boyd to Burlew, Letter, April 11, 1941, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 2).

Assistant Secretary Burlew responded:

Over a period of several years the Department of the Interior has given serious consideration to the problem of segregation and the provision of adequate facilities for Negroes visiting Shenandoah National Park. You realize, of course, that the practice of segregation for many years in the Southern states cannot be changed at once by an order of the Department of the Interior.<sup>126</sup>

First Assistant Secretary Burlew detailed in his letter to Boyd the steps that had been taken in 1939 to provide for the joint use by Whites and African Americans of certain areas at Shenandoah, the removal of the notations of separate facilities from park literature, and the completion of a separate but equal facility for African Americans at Lewis Mountain, adding that in this instance, the segregation of race was based on the preferences of park visitors. First Assistant Burlew states, "In fairness to the Negroes and White people who prefer to have individual accommodations, these areas must be maintained separately." First Assistant Secretary Burlew also mentioned that all signs referencing "Colored" facilities would be removed within the next year as the picnic grounds at Shenandoah became available to all races. He closed the letter with "The National Park Service of this Department is doing everything possible to extend a friendly welcome to all visitors to Shenandoah National

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<sup>126</sup> Burlew to Boyd, April 11, 1941, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 2).

Park.”<sup>127</sup> That same day, First Assistant Secretary Burlew wrote to Advisor Trent referring to Boyd’s letter and reiterated the same:

The Lewis Mountain lodge picnic area and campground were open to the public in July, 1940. The lodge had only about 5 per cent maximum use, the picnic ground about 10 per cent, and the campground was not used at all. As explained to Miss Boyd, in fairness to Negro and White people who desire individual accommodations, the Lewis Mountain and Big Meadows areas will be designated for the present. I believe that the National Park Service is meeting these problems in a satisfactory way and that the Negro visitors to Shenandoah National Park are being extended a friendly welcome. Miss Boyd’s letter is returned for your files.<sup>128</sup>

In a letter dated May 5, 1941, Advisor Trent responded and expressed gratitude for “the decision to open all of the picnic areas to all races without distinction,” indicating that the decision is “most assuredly in keeping with the best American tradition.”<sup>129</sup> Advisor Trent also mentioned that this action, in his view, would be helpful in alleviating the “unfortunate barriers that have been raised against Negro people.”<sup>130</sup> First Assistant Secretary Burlew immediately responded and communicated to Advisor Trent that he not only appreciated his letter, but he

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Burlew to Trent, Letter, April 11, 1941, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 2).

<sup>129</sup> Trent to Burlew, Letter, May 5, 1941, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 2).

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

further assured him that the situation would be resolved at Shenandoah.<sup>131</sup>

The path from segregation practices to these non-segregation procedures demonstrated a significant shift from the complete adherence to Jim Crow law and custom by the NPS to a somewhat more progressive policy that provided joint use and/or separate but equal accommodations at its sites. However, the conditions stipulated in the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy did not go far enough from a standpoint of providing civil rights under federal law and resulted in a push toward complete desegregation that would sanction African Americans unrestricted use of all parks and facilities.

#### **NPS: Moving to a Desegregation Policy**

Incidents continued to occur at Shenandoah and elsewhere in the NPS system proving that practices authorized by the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy would not be instituted easily. On July 1, 1941, in a memorandum from Assistant Secretary Chapman addressed to Secretary Ickes, Chapman called to the Secretary's attention an incident that occurred at Potomac Park golf course in Washington, D.C. Chapman relayed that a guest of the course was

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<sup>131</sup> Burlew to Trent, Letter, May 5, 1941, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 2).

approached by a group and asked to sign a petition, one that was intended to be delivered to the President of the United States, to “exclude Negroes from playing golf on the course.”<sup>132</sup> News of the request became public due to the fact that the golfer approached happened to be a local reporter. Chapman provided further evidence showing that the situation at Potomac Park grew more serious and warned Secretary Ickes that altercations were imminent if African Americans continued their attempt to play the course. There was speculation that if African Americans were permitted to use the course, then they would be confronted by United States soldiers from the area. Believing the issue to be palpable, Secretary Ickes wrote directly to the Secretary of War, Henry L. Stinson, and asked that he intervene and discourage such activities.<sup>133</sup> From the NPS point of view, assurances were provided to Secretary Ickes, through Assistant Director Demaray, that NPS personnel was working with African American groups to resolve the issue in that they had been asked not to follow through with plans to utilize the golf course in hopes that this would prevent a forecasted altercation.<sup>134</sup>

Secretary Ickes continued to be pressured from politicians representing states in the

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<sup>132</sup> Chapman to Ickes, Memorandum, July 1, 1941, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 2).

<sup>133</sup> Ickes to Stinson, Letter, July 16, 1941, NARA RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 2).

<sup>134</sup> Ickes to Demaray, Memorandum, July 17, 1941, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 2).

Southern region. In August of 1941, Carter Manasco, a United States House Representative from Alabama, wrote to Ickes and discussed what he viewed was a correlation between the NPS' "desegregation" of the facilities and activities in the National Capital Parks system with the nightly attacks on Caucasian girls in the District of Columbia area by African Americans. Manasco appealed to the Secretary's sense of patriotism in saying, "I know that you, as a patriotic American, are opposed to these bestial expressions by members of the Colored race," while simultaneously accusing Secretary Ickes of influencing such activities. Manasco viewed the Secretary's decision to permit African Americans to play golf on the courses at National Capital Park, coupled with ordering police to escort them to insure their safety, contributed to the brazenness that ultimately led to the nightly attacks on white girls. Manasco assigned blame to African Americans as well suggesting that their actions resulted from a lack of nationalism stating, "Of course, a patriotic, freedom-loving American Negro would not attempt to use a park or golf course used exclusively by White people." Manasco was unrelenting in his disparaging comments and condoned reciprocal violent attacks on African Americans because he felt it was warranted, citing that the behavior of Washington's black children was "impudent and disrespectful of grown people," therefore "it is very trying to restrain from stomping them into the earth." Not to be characterized as entirely bigoted, Manasco asserted

that he was familiar with Colored people and had the ability to get along with “decent” ones, but for those causing trouble, i.e. those attempting to push for equality and policy changes so that they could enjoy White social privileges, “serious trouble is in the offing.” Manasco predicted that if desegregation attempts continued to occur that the deaths of many “loyal” and “patriotic” Colored people was imminent. He closed his letter recounting the respect he had for Secretary Ickes’ position all while criticizing his character declaring, “I sincerely trust you will give this matter your most careful consideration and will use your prestige in trying to promote better racial feelings instead of disrupting them” instead of being used as a “tool” by members of divisive groups, those pressuring for change.<sup>135</sup>

A few days after receiving Manasco’s letter, Secretary Ickes provided a brusque response that began:

It is well known that I have taken a stand against racial discrimination, but I have attempted to be moderate in my viewpoint, realizing, of course, that generations of prejudice cannot be eliminated by edict. This does not mean, however, that I do not deplore the increase in sex crimes which have been committed in the District of Columbia within recent months, but for the life of me I do not see how you can connect them with my attitude on racial discrimination.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Manasco to Ickes, Letter, August 5, 1941, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 2).

<sup>136</sup> Ickes to Manasco, Letter, August 13, 1941, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 2).

And the Secretary closed indicating that he continued to support the rights of African Americans and policy that provided for the joint use and creation of separate but equal facilities, yet he did not suggest that complete desegregation was at issue:

I am wondering how you, as a federal official sworn to uphold and defend the Constitution, can honestly take the attitude that you have with regard to racial discrimination, when the Constitution requires that facilities for the Negro shall be equal to those furnished to the White citizen. This is a problem which is continually confronting me as an executive officer of the Government. I assure you, for whatever it is worth, that I have not been 'an innocent tool' nor have I wittingly or 'unwittingly' supported subversive activities, as you suggest.<sup>137</sup>

In mid-1942, Advisor Trent sent a memorandum to First Assistant Secretary Burlew detailing the progress made in the relations between African Americans and the NPS including increased employment opportunities, the ability to participate in telling narratives that "include stories of Negroes" at NPS sites, and the increase of and/or improvements made at "Recreation Demonstration Areas that have been developed for Negroes." Advisor Trent felt that the African American community should be made aware of these advancements and that a concerted effort to publicize and release this information "to the Negro press" should occur periodically. Advisor Trent also requested that First Assistant Secretary Burlew issue a "directive to all National Park Superintendents in the south and southeast informing them that

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

hereafter there are to be no segregated areas in National Parks” and explained that this advancement particularly should “be given wide publicity in the Negro press.”<sup>138</sup>

First Assistant Secretary Burlew provided the memo to Director Drury and requested, as suggested by Advisor Trent, the end to segregation of African Americans at NPS sites in the South.<sup>139</sup> On June 15, 1942, Director Drury made that decision and sent a memo to the Regional One Director tasking him with assuring “that all facilities administered by his bureau, including picnic grounds and campgrounds in the Southern states, should be administered on a non-segregated basis.”<sup>140</sup> This is the first evidence of an effort to institute a “desegregation” policy at the NPS.

By 1948 Associate Director Demaray declared that there were no regulations in place that provided for the “segregation of White and Negro recreational programs in areas under the control of the Interior Department.” This declaration came forth in a reply to a request from Ida Fix, the Executive Secretary for the Council of Civil Rights, for the establishment of a “policy of nondiscrimination governing use of recreational facilities in the National Capital

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<sup>138</sup> Trent to Burlew, Letter, May 5, 1941, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Racial Discrimination Files (Part 2).

<sup>139</sup> Burlew to Drury, Memorandum, May 22, 1942, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 2).

<sup>140</sup> Terence Young, “A Contradiction in Democratic Government: W. J. Trent, Jr., and the Struggle to Desegregate National Park Campgrounds,” *Environmental History* 14, no. 4 (2009): 672 and Devlin, 159.

Parks,” due to the fact that segregation practices were exercised there by those working in the Recreation Department. Associate Director Demaray responded that on July 10, 1945, the Acting Secretary of Interior wrote to the Chairman of the District of Columbia Recreational Board confirming that a non-segregation policy was in place and informed him that regulations adopted by the Board providing for the segregation of White and Negro recreational programs did not apply across areas under the control of the Interior Department.<sup>141</sup> Yet that affirmation from Director Demaray did not resolve the issue with the District of Columbia Recreational Board as seen by the ongoing involvement of the Office of Solicitor.

In 1950 Indritz of the Solicitor’s Office continued to deal with the jurisdiction issues that affected segregation at NPS sites in Southern regions. In a memorandum addressed to Dale Doty, an Assistant to the Secretary, Indritz provided the legal points argued before the Justice Department over the “long and controversial issue” and expressed the need for the Attorney General to issue an opinion concerning jurisdiction over park areas in the District of Columbia. As stated in the memorandum, the original request for that decision was made on August 2, 1948, and according to Indritz because the Attorney General had not acted on the request,

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<sup>141</sup> Demaray to Fix, Letter, June 14, 1948, NARA, RG 79, Box 2827, Central Classified File, 1933-1949, National Capital Park, 601-601.2.

segregation practices persisted in the District of Columbia parks for the ensuing years. Indritz, in referencing the almost two-year wait, concluded that the delay was due to political issues and he also relayed that the Recreational Board for the District of Columbia declared that it would continue segregation practices until an opinion of the Attorney General was delivered and suggested otherwise.<sup>142</sup>

The debate over ending segregation lingered as evidenced by a letter written in March of 1952 to Director Chapman from William D. Nixon, the President of Oldest Inhabitants, Inc., a civic heritage organization that operated in the Washington area. In this letter, Nixon urged Director Chapman to push for the integration of public playgrounds in the District of Columbia and place them under the control of the Secretary of the Interior if issues with the Recreational Board could not be resolved. Nixon cited statistics relating to the playgrounds in the District of Columbia area and revealed that from 1945 through 1952, desegregation had occurred at only 9 of 125 sites. He closed by complimenting the efforts made by former Secretary Ickes toward desegregation of NPS sites stating, "May justice and light be the continued aim of the Department of the Interior following fearlessly in the beacon light set aflame by the late great

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<sup>142</sup> Indritz to Doty, Memorandum, May 10, 1950, NARA, RG 48, Box 3838, Central Classified File 1937-1953, 12-41 Administrative (Part 7).

American, Harold L. Ickes,” strengthening his appeal for the current Secretary to move forward on the issue in the same manner.<sup>143</sup>

Not all correspondence received by the NPS promoted progress, however. On March 4, 1952, Thomas G. Abernathy, a United States House Representative from Mississippi forwarded a letter to Secretary Oscar Chapman that focused on desegregation at the hands of the NPS. Abernathy referred to a speech Secretary Chapman delivered at a Negro Youth Conference encouraging desegregation. Abernathy questioned whether Secretary Chapman endorsed desegregation in his personal life, referring to the efforts to integrate races in the parks and pools near the Secretary’s home in Maryland. He inquired as to whether Secretary Chapman and his family used desegregated facilities or whether continued to live a segregated life.<sup>144</sup> Secretary Chapman responded to Abernathy by providing citations of case law with regard to desegregation to support the decisions of his office and indicated that he felt no need to answer questions or address issues with regard to his family and personal life.<sup>145</sup> Abernathy quickly countered in a response letter and accused Secretary Chapman of dodging the issue

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<sup>143</sup> Nixon to Chapman, Letter, March 16, 1952, NARA RG 48, Box 3838, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-41 Administrative (Part 7).

<sup>144</sup> Abernathy to Chapman, Letter, March 4, 1952, NARA, RG 48, Box 3838, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-41 Administrative (Part 7).

<sup>145</sup> Chapman to Abernathy, Letter, March 15, 1952, NARA, RG 48, Box 3838, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-41 Administrative (Part 7).

asserting, “I feel that I and the public have every right to assume that neither you nor any member of your family have ever practiced, nor do you intend to practice, this policy which has been forced on the people of this community and to which enforcement you are a party.”

There is a handwritten note on that letter that reads, “This letter was not answered. H.B.,” and it can be assumed that this was the notation of Secretary Chapman’s personal assistant.<sup>146</sup>

As late as 1960 the NPS continued to receive correspondence from politicians requesting information about desegregation at its national parks and sites. In July of 1960, United States Senator Jacob K. Javits of New York forwarded a letter expressing his concern regarding the general policy to Director Wirth due to an incident Javits read about in the *Washington Post* that occurred at De Soto National Park in Mississippi. According to that account, in July of 1960, a group of African American picnickers were asked to leave the park by a team of law enforcement officials due to the gathering of a large number of White visitors to the site, and Javits questioned the actions of those officials.<sup>147</sup> The response to Javits did not come directly from Director Wirth, but instead was penned by Secretary Elmer Bennett. Secretary Bennett clarified that the NPS did not administer De Soto National Park, but that

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<sup>146</sup> Abernathy to Chapman, Letter, March 29, 1952, NARA, RG 48, Box 3838, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-41 Administrative (Part 7).

<sup>147</sup> Javits to Wirth, Letter, July 6, 1960, NARA, RG 79, Box 0355, Administrative Files, 1949-1971, Complaints by Region.

there were picnic areas located in De Soto National Forest and he suggested that Javits contact the National Forest Service to discuss and/or resolve the issue with them. Secretary Bennett did, however, confirm NPS policy on discrimination:

The National Park Service's nondiscrimination policy is very clear and concise. In the areas administered by the National Park Service all visitors may enjoy accommodations, camping facilities, or other conveniences provided for the public without discrimination or denial of use or occupancy because of race, religion, color, or national origin. This holds true regardless of whether the facilities or accommodations are made available by the federal government, or whether available by concessioners operating on park lands. Contracts with private companies provide specifically that all facilities and accommodations for the public shall be provided on a nondiscriminatory basis. We are not aware of any departure from this policy.<sup>148</sup>

Although policy barred discriminative practices at NPS sites in the 1960s, in some Southern regions modifying behavior to comply with that policy continued to be challenging. But efforts continued and by 1964, not only did NPS policy address racial segregation at its parks and sites, but the Civil Rights Act was passed providing legislation aimed to assure that public facilities of every type were open to all Americans regardless of race.

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<sup>148</sup> Bennett to Javits, Letter, July 25, 1960, NARA, RG 79, Box 0355, Administrative Files, 1949-1971, Complaints by Region.

## CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY – BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY

### 5.1 *Results and Findings*

#### 5.1.1 *Archival Research*

##### **Parkway: Development of Recreational Parks**

In accordance with its planning documents:

The Blue Ridge Parkway was first conceived as a scenic road to connect the Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks in the fall of 1933. After several conferences and hearings at which various officials of the States of Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, and the federal government were represented, the Secretary of the Interior allocated Public Works Administration funds for the development, the necessary lands and preliminary surveys to be furnished by the States as their part in a co-operative enterprise. The first direct authorization of funds by the Congress as part of the Department of Interior Bill became law on June 30, 1936.

The early versions of the master plan also detail the “significant theme” of the Parkway, one setting out the goals of development that in its creation, Americans were provided “with a roadway which may be comfortably and safely driven within an elongated and park-like right-of-way protected by federal ownership against despoliation and commercial encroachments, and located generally high in the Blue Ridge.<sup>149</sup> The timing for an endeavor such as this was opportune as automobile ownership was on the rise and trends towards leisure pointed to

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<sup>149</sup> National Park Service, Master Plans Blue Ridge Parkway, NARA, RG 79 – Cartographic Records, 1896-1990, Folders 1-3.

traveling by car and visiting national park sites. As indicated in the master plan, “Eastern people [were] just discovering the mountains which the Parkway makes readily available and popular as supported by attendance records at Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks.”<sup>150</sup> Ultimately, the connection between these two national parks was planned via a route running for nearly 500 miles south through Virginia and continuing into North Carolina. Any lands allocated along the route to be used in the construction of the Parkway not owned by the federal government directly were acquired first by each state and then transferred to the federal government via rights-of-way and scenic easements. Funding for the actual construction of the Parkway was provided through federal relief programs including the Federal Works Project.<sup>151</sup>

Due to the Parkway’s projected length, it was determined that recreation areas were needed along the route where picnic facilities, comfort stations, and eventually accommodations for gas, food and lodging would be provided. For these recreational areas, the land was acquired through the Resettlement Administration Program and were to be developed concurrently with the roadway. Initially, 19 recreation areas were anticipated and

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Richard Quin, “Blue Ridge Parkway, Historic American Engineering Record,” National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, No. NC-42, 1997: 21-30.

programmed to be located at intervals of 20-30 miles apart with “the precise locations all dependent upon local scenic attractions.”<sup>152</sup>

It was determined that the development of the recreational areas would begin at an initial five locations and “when use at a particular area reaches its maximum, the policy is to establish a new development nearby so as to decrease congestion.” These recreational areas were not to interfere with, but instead were meant to supplement commerce in nearby communities:

Accommodations within the Parkway are limited to those necessary for appropriate and normal public use and are planned only where adequate facilities are not reasonably convenient in the towns and cities nearby. Overnight lodging, dining facilities, and gasoline stations are constructed only at recreation areas distant from cities and towns.<sup>153</sup>

The five recreational areas initially planned were at Bluff Park and Cumberland Knob located in North Carolina, and Rocky Knob, Smart View, and Pine Spur situated in Virginia. Of the five original parks, four would be designed to accommodate African American visitors and one would be developed for their exclusive use. Over the course of time and in the planning of additional recreational areas, other parks were designated to provide accommodations for

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<sup>152</sup> Weems to Regional Director, Memorandum, December 2, 1954, BLRI Archives, RG 5, Series 41, Box 51, Folder 16.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

African Americans as well including Fishers Peak and Otter Creek, both sited in Virginia.

The planning of these segregated areas reveals that the NPS was influenced by the Jim Crow laws in effect and/or the customs of the states of Virginia and North Carolina in its development of the Parkway's recreational parks. The lands, however, acquired or to be acquired for the recreational areas were not the result of transfers by either state, but instead were attained by the NPS from the National Forest Service through federal funding sources and programs in place in the 1930s. In addition, the Act of Congress that authorized the Parkway legislatively "...placed the new Parkway under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service," and "...dictated that the U.S. Forest Service was to work with the National Park Service on the development of recreational facilities on federal lands along the route."<sup>154</sup>

### **Parkway: Evolution of Segregation/Non-Segregation Policy**

From the time of the opening of the first recreational area at Cumberland Knob in 1937, a park that developed in accordance with the 1936 Master Plan to include segregated facilities for White and African American visitors, to early 1939 when other parks were proposed or established, there was significant data available to the Office of the Secretary of the Interior with detailing the segregation practices in effect on the Parkway. In a memorandum dated

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<sup>154</sup> Quin, 75.

March 14, 1939 to First Assistant Secretary Burlew, Assistant Director Demaray provided information as to the “existing and proposed facilities for Negro and White visitors” in the south including those along the Parkway. In tabulations attached to that memo, a detailed breakdown of the amenities offered at Cumberland Knob, Bluff Park, Rocky Knob, and Smart View were so specific that they included the number of parking spots designated for use by each race. The information reflected in that document revealed that the development at these four recreational areas was geared primarily for use by White visitors with minimal accommodations made at each for African Americans to use while the construction of a “Negro only” facility at Pine Spur was pending.<sup>155</sup>

As indicated in that memo, there were no picnic units, camp units, or trailer units designated for use by African Americans specifically at any park, yet plans were in place to furnish them with overnight accommodations and other amenities that would include picnic areas, pit toilets, comfort stations, drinking fountains, laundry facilities, shelters, foot trails, horse trails, along with the requisite parking areas as well. The plans proposed at this time also included additional facilities to be constructed at these four parks for “Whites only” and a few areas within them designated for “joint” use. Concessions at several parks were also in the

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<sup>155</sup> Demaray to Burlew, Memorandum, March 14, 1939, NARA, RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 1).

planning stages with three gasoline stations being developed that would include “separate toilet facilities for Negro and White visitors.”<sup>156</sup> (Fig. 1).

Resident Landscape Architect (RLA) Abbott submitted a Progress Report on the Development of Recreational Areas in April of 1939 to the NPS Chief of Planning Vint. The report suggested that despite delays in the acquisition of lands and funding for construction, advances had been made in planning recreational areas on the Parkway specifically noting those for African Americans, “...in recent weeks plans have begun to crystallize for provisions of recreational facilities for the Negroes.” RLA Abbott proceeded with an overall recommendation that “certain new courses of actions” be followed with the general planning focused on “Negro development.” Outlined in the general planning section of that report, RLA Abbott indicated that there was an overall understanding of an approved scheme, yet he does not say policy specifically, and provides the details outlining segregation of races at Parkway facilities that are to be approved by Secretary Ickes. The delineated points of what RLA Abbott terms as “the approved scheme” are similar to the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy in intent but not in detail:

The planning for recreational facilities for Negroes has seemed a particularly difficult problem since the inception of the work. Especially helpful, however, your conferences with the Committee on Negro Affairs, and these plans seem now to have crystallized in

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

a most satisfactory manner. Subject to further check in the meeting proposed for April 26 with Mr. Trent, the following is our general understanding of the approved scheme of development:

1. The same or perhaps more uncertainty exists in anticipating the use of the Parkway for Negroes as exists in connection with planning for recreation of the Whites; consequently, the same conservative policy of providing a desirable minimum of facility subject to extension in the future as needs become known will apply to both type of parks.
2. The approach to planning for the Negro park areas will also be similar with respect to distribution along the Parkway in relation to both the long distance traveler and as well, the loop travel from towns and cities nearby the Parkway.
3. Plans for all gasoline stations and combination gasoline coffee or sandwich shops will include separate toilet facilities for both races and sexes.
4. Within certain of the larger parks separated facilities will be provided for picnicking and camping for both races.
5. Most of the smaller park areas and certain of the larger where developable lands are limited will be designated as all White or all Negro.<sup>157</sup>

RLA Abbott's report then detailed the allocation of amenities at facilities for use by Whites and African Americans within each park. At Fishers Peak, for example, the "development of picnic facilities for both Whites and Negroes in separated units" was anticipated once the land had been secured for the area, and although distinct for each race, the plans designated "similar facilities" for both. At Cumberland Knob, construction was set to begin for "temporary picnic facilities for Negroes" until Fishers Peak could be developed. RLA Abbott also supplied information about Pine Spur, signifying that progress had stalled at the

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<sup>157</sup> Abbott to Vint, Progress Report Development of Recreational Areas, April 24, 1939, BLRI Archives, RG 7, Series 35, Box 50, Folder 1 and RG 7, Series 41, Box 57, Folder 16.

site due to a lack of funds. He did suggest, however, that once monies were made available, Pine Spur should be advanced and improvements could be made there by utilizing “an ERA project for Negroes from the vicinity of Roanoke,” a nearby community. RLA Abbott contended that the land acquired for Pine Spur provided “many fine views and a beautiful pine woods for development as a picnic and camping unit.” Interestingly, he also added that, “If the need for accommodation of White people in this vicinity arises in the future additional land contiguous to the present area would need to be purchased to the northeast” as the intent at that time was only “to serve the considerable Negro population of Roanoke.” It could be that RLA Abbott was justifying “finding the monies” to advance the Pine Spur area by representing that it might not only serve the African American community, but also White travelers at some point. The last park discussed in that report was the Bluffs, one of the largest recreational areas on the Parkway comprised of over 8000 acres of land, and at the urging of RLA Abbott, movement to include “Negro facilities” was to commence without delay.<sup>158</sup>

In summary, RLA Abbott relayed to Planning Chief Vint that the proposals made were sufficient and would be helpful in future planning for African Americans:

In general we believe the above facilities for Negroes are well spaced and will give adequate accommodation and that the areas which have been selected are outstandingly fine in scenic quality and development possibilities. Also we feel that the

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

developments which are proposed on the attached copy of the master plan will attract use of the Parkway by Negroes and will form a good basis upon which to determine future needs for extension of facilities for this race.<sup>159</sup>

At the time of this report, there were no concession structures at any of the referenced parks because there had been no bids made by contractors to operate any concessions built by the National Park Service, which as RLA Abbott suggested, was an issue of great concern. He made recommendations that the bid process be modified so that the NPS maintained control over the structures to be built, indicating that it would have authority over the designs and drawings, but that the concessionaire be responsible for construction and the ultimate operation. In doing so, by following the plans that had been developed by the NPS, the concessionaire would be bound to construct and operate segregated facilities:

It is believed that serious consideration should be given to the adoption of a policy of advertising for bids on concessions upon the basis that the successful bidder would build the particular unit in accordance with plans to be provided by the National Park Service. While it is recognized that construction by the Government would be preferable if special arrangements are made to control the plans and specifications of the work, we believe that this second choice is under the circumstances the best means of prosecuting these important developments."<sup>160</sup>

Further evidence that segregated parks and concession facilities were to be designed on the Parkway to accommodate African Americans in accordance with Jim Crow law and/or

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

custom can be seen in documents prepared by the Office of the Landscape Architect. Robert G. Hall, the Associate Landscape Architect, reported to RLA Abbott, as a follow-up to a discussion the two had in the field when surveying the Parkway, that master plans for “Negro” development would be delivered for approval in early 1940.<sup>161</sup> There are no specifics as to where or what Associate Landscape Architect Hall was referring to, but in the year prior, RLA Abbott had provided clarity regarding park improvements in a memorandum to Planning Chief Vint for the five recreational areas that would include accommodations for African Americans.

Regarding Pine Spur, RLA Abbott wrote:

We agreed upon a general area of land now included within the Pine Spur Park as being susceptible of desirable recreational development for Negroes. We are proceeding to take the necessary topography preparatory to planning the area where there was discussion of the possibility that actual development might proceed in the near future providing support of the Colored relations board could be given toward procuring a delegation of Colored WPA workers from Roanoke City for this purpose.<sup>162</sup>

That topographical work was completed the following year. (Fig. 2).

In referencing Rocky Knob, RLA Abbott confirmed that the general plans for a proposed coffee shop as drafted were “considered OK” and that it was “tentatively decided that no dining room for Negroes would be provided.” (Fig. 3). At Fishers Peak, due to increased use of the

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<sup>161</sup> Hall to Abbott, Memorandum, December 22, 1939, BLRI Archives, RG 7, Series 41, Box 57, Folder 20.

<sup>162</sup> Abbott to Vint, Memorandum, April 7, 1939, BLRI Archives, RG 7, Series 41, Box 57, Folder 16.

Parkway by African Americans, RLA Abbott confirmed a discussion of the “very good possibility of devoting the north end of the park to development for Negroes.” (Fig. 4). Until Fishers Peak was developed, however, the amenities at Cumberland Knob would need to include some access for African Americans, “it was determined that Cumberland Knob Park was too restricted in the amount of developable land to permit additional picnicking for camping for Negroes, although the addition of a few picnic tables . . . was considered as a sound temporary arrangement.” (Fig. 5). At Bluff Park, “the possible development of an intermediate area for a combination development for Negroes was thought generally acceptable,” and they would proceed with topography survey of this tract if money became available for its development. (Fig. 6 and Fig. 7). And finally, when considering the proposed gas stations planned for three of the recreational areas, the report signified that Planning Chief Vint and RLA Abbott had “decided that in any event Negro toilets should be provided at all gasoline stations though no other use by the two races of any of the buildings would likely be required if certain definite park areas were given over entirely to Negroes.” In this way, a dining facility if offered at gas stations, could be designated for the exclusive use of White customers.<sup>163</sup>

As seen in this memorandum, issues of funding were only mentioned in relation to

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

those areas designated for African Americans, yet projects proceeded for White visitors as additional recreational areas were desired to support their needs on the ever-growing Parkway. RLA Abbott highlighted, however, that the demand for facilities to be used by African Americans could provide a sound argument to validate obtaining the monies needed for all desired recreational parks, “We discussed the possibility of obtaining support for the needed land acquisition of the remaining 19 parks on the basis of having to devote certain areas to Negro recreational developments, that being an additional justification.”<sup>164</sup>

Although these segregation practices in the development of the Parkway’s recreational areas mirrored some of the principles and the requirements set out in the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy, one of the first references to an official policy for the Parkway was mentioned in the Annual Report written by Superintendent Abbott dated June 30, 1939. In the section entitled “The Recreational Parks Program” and under the subsection “Provisions for Negroes,” he states that, “General plans crystallized during the year for the provision of Negro facilities in the recreation parks,” whereby he once again referred to the conference of April 26, 1939, at which the “points of agreement resulted” and were “approved by the Secretary.” The report provided more insight into Superintendent Abbott’s view that the policy was tentative in

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

nature and one he considered as the forerunner of a more definitive policy to come:

Your staff in the field and to an extent the conference in Washington recognizes that this problem has probably not see a final solution, but that ground work has been laid to test by observation of the use of the various facilities the shaping of a final policy. The need for recreational facilities for Negroes in western Virginia and North Carolina is considerable, and its provision in connection with the Parkway in the best possible manner should be a major objective.<sup>165</sup>

Without a definitive policy, Superintendent Abbott struggled with procedure and was uncertain as to the existence of any segregation policy for the Parkway and conveyed his concerns in a memorandum dated January 13, 1940, to Director Barton. He requested clarification, "In connection with the study of special rules and regulations for the Blue Ridge Parkway, we would draw your attention to the possible need to cover the restricted use by Negroes of recreational facilities. We have been assuming that these matters are handled by establishment of policy administratively."<sup>166</sup> In a response memo dated April 9, 1940, from the Chief Counsel of the Department of Interior, G.A. Moskey, the issue was addressed and that reply appears to indicate that the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy was not necessarily a "policy" in effect at the Parkway:

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<sup>165</sup> Abbott, Superintendent's Annual Report, June 30, 1939, NARA, RG 79, Box 2717, Central Classified File 206-207.01.

<sup>166</sup> Abbott to Barton, Memorandum, January 13, 1940, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified Files, 1933-1949, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604.

Relating to the problem of use by Negroes of recreational facilities established in connection with the Blue Ridge Parkway . . . The problem is an administrative one, and it is not contemplated that it will be covered by regulations. You are undoubtedly familiar with the manner in which the matter is handled in Shenandoah National Park, where one campground has been reserved for White visitors, another for Colored visitors, and another has been maintained without restrictions.”<sup>167</sup>

Although Superintendent Abbott clearly understood the approved procedure at Shenandoah, i.e. the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy, Chief Counsel Moskey’s response did not provide final resolution for him as to what the policy was regarding segregation of recreational facilities and concessions on the Parkway. Correspondence to and from Superintendent Abbott continued to refer to policy and the procedures relating to segregation practices, but there did not appear to be an official policy designated for the Parkway through the end of 1939.

In a memorandum dated April 6, 1940, Superintendent Abbott submitted data to the Regional Director for approval of drawings for design relating to continued development at Cumberland Knob Park, wherein he not only promoted the need for further drawings, but also included an annotated drawing for a proposed picnic shelter. Although the notations on the drawing dealt with multiple issues, there is one reference that reads, “I call to your attention subsequent departmental policy with regard to segregation of races in the layout for the

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<sup>167</sup> Moskey to Abbott, Memorandum, April 9, 1940, NARA RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified Files, 1933-1949, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604.

Comfort Station.”<sup>168</sup> (Fig. 8). Superintendent Abbott appeared to be suggesting that the drawing contained segregated areas that violated the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy regulating comfort stations, “if one building is used for both Negroes and Whites, then sexes of both races will use common entrances, inside the building separate toilets will be provided for each race.” And although this drawing was superseded on November 3, 1939, and then again on May 28, 1940, the revised drawings continued to delineate completely segregated restrooms. However, on a subsequent iteration of the drawing approved on July 2, 1940, the restrooms were not designated by race indicating that at some point the intent of the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy had been implemented at the Parkway. (Fig. 9).

Policy or not, into the 1940s state segregation practices were accepted at the Parkway with Southern custom having an impact on decisions made to separate Whites and African Americans. W. G. Carnes, the Acting Chief of Planning for the NPS, forwarded a memorandum to Superintendent Abbott in June of 1940 recommending procedures in the preparation of both architectural drawings and the narratives to be included in future editions of the Parkway’s master plans. When mentioning the development at Pine Spur, Carnes referred to it as “Pine Spur Negro Recreational Area” and requested that full descriptions of the roads, trails, and

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<sup>168</sup> Abbott to Regional Director, Memorandum, April 6, 1940, BLRI Archives, RG 3, Series 16, Box 91.

buildings at the site be provided “so that a complete picture is presented.” When writing about the Fishers Peak area, Carnes referenced an existing engineering report that denoted the location of the “Negro picnicking and bathing facilities” as being “upstream from and on the watershed of bathing development for Whites.” The reference is significant as he drew Superintendent Abbott’s attention to the fact that the engineer had voiced his personal view “that this may result in the self-imposed exclusion of many White users” and that the situation could be corrected “by placing the Negro development on the east side of the lake near the lower end and provide access over the existing road shown on the drawing to be obliterated and moving the development for Whites to the upper end of the lake on the west side.”<sup>169</sup>

In an attempt to clarify the confusion as to a policy and the procedures to follow concerning use of recreational areas and facilities on the Parkway, on June 28, 1940, Superintendent Abbott dealt with the issue directly by writing a lengthy memorandum to the file and copying it to NPS officials and five of the Parkway’s rangers (Abbott 1940 Parkway Policy Clarification). The memo was written to outline the policy “... to govern the development and use of accommodations for Negro visitors on the Blue Ridge Parkway” and instructed that the points delineated in the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy would “remain our broad guide

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<sup>169</sup> Carnes to Abbott, Memorandum, June 10, 1940, BLRI Archives, RG 5, Series 8, Box 9, Folder 1.

in those matters until otherwise informed.” Superintendent Abbott also declared that the master plans of April 26, 1940 “will remain our program until otherwise informed.”<sup>170</sup> Such plans, as mentioned, provided for segregation through exclusion, designation of spaces, and/or separated areas.

Superintendent Abbott went on to caution the Parkway’s rangers to use “careful and tactful compliance” to the terms of the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy and suggested they “show every courtesy to the White and Negro visitors, and effort should be made to keep the White and Negro visitors reasonably segregated in various use areas, but with the least possible attention being drawn to the problem.” He also dealt with the issue of signage, “No signs are to be erected except on stall doors within the comfort stations until further study has been made of this problem when the need becomes emphasized.” And further, he instructed “You will please consider your individual responsibilities in connection with this memorandum and immediately review and take any necessary steps to see that we are operating in accordance herewith. It is suggested that after your study, you report more in detail on plans for Mr. Weems’ approval.”<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Abbott to File, Memorandum, June 28, 1940, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified Files, 1933-1949, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604 and BLRI Archives, RG 7, Series 41, Box 57, Folder 21.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

Incorporated into this memorandum was a description of all park areas offering “Negro accommodations” which included Pine Spur (although not yet completed), Smart View, Rocky Knob, Cumberland Knob, and Bluff Park. When Superintendent Abbott described the facilities more specifically at each of the parks, it appeared that the terms of the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy were followed. For example, at Pine Spur, he suggested that “when funds become available a Negro area comparable in quality to Smart View Park, though probably smaller in scale and with a gas station, will be developed for operation by a Negro operator.” In accordance with NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy, at larger park locations, completely separate facilities could be constructed for the exclusive use by African Americans as long as they are equal to facilities provided for Whites, and Abbott is clear in mentioning that the facilities at Pine Spur would be comparable in quality to those at Smart View.<sup>172</sup>

And at Smart View, the “Negro accommodations to be furnished within the comfort stations, gasoline and food at coffee shops to be available to both races, arrangements for the latter to be worked out between the Service and the operator of the coffee shop” also conformed to the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy. And once Pine Spur was opened, there would be no violation of the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy, when the facilities at Smart

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

View would be designated for the exclusive use of White visitors, as Superintendent Abbott stated was the plan, “No picnic or recreational facilities available to the Negro at this park [Smart View] after Pine Spur development is made.” He did caution, however, that until that time, Smart View would accommodate “joint” use by both Whites and African Americans, and “the Ranger through the watchman will designate where the Negro visitor is to picnic.”<sup>173</sup> (Fig. 10).

African Americans would also be accommodated at Rocky Knob and the gas station and coffee shops would be like those agreed upon at Smart View. Rocky Knob did not provide any picnic or camping areas for African Americans specifically, but Superintendent Abbott again, designated a watchman to be responsible for specifying the areas “where Negro visitors are to picnic” until the other sites became available for them.<sup>174</sup> In the drawing for the coffee shop and gasoline station at Rocky Knob which included a full dining room, although not labelled distinctly, it appears that it would only be used by White patrons due to the fact that the restrooms labelled “White Women” and “White Men” are the only ones directly accessed from that space. The rest rooms provided for African Americans labeled “Colored Women” and

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

“Colored Men” could only be accessed from the exterior of the building, again suggesting that the dining room was not available to them. The NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy allowed for a White only dining room at concession facilities, so this exclusion would not have violated that policy. As the drawing for this facility was updated over the years, by 1946, the layout had not changed, yet the earlier notations of “White” and “Colored” were removed from the restrooms on the drawing. (Fig. 11 and Fig. 12).

Compliance with the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy could be seen at Cumberland Knob as well by the designation of specific sections within the picnic area for use by African Americans, “a five-unit picnic area has been developed for Negroes” with the remaining 34-unit picnic areas designated for use by Whites only. Superintendent Abbott stated that on busy days, the watchman would be responsible for advising visitors where to picnic and he could use discretion in allowing White visitors to use the entire park, however “preference during crowded days should be given the Negroes.”<sup>175</sup> (Fig. 13 and Fig. 14).

At the time Superintendent Abbott wrote this memo, development at Bluff Park was in progress and what was known as “Picnic Area No. 1” was designated for joint use by both races

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<sup>175</sup> Abbott to File, Memorandum, June 28, 1940, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified Files, 1933-1949, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604 and BLRI Archives, RG 7, Series 41, Box 57, Folder 21.

until a separate area exclusively for African Americans was established there. A gas station and coffee shop was planned for the site and was to be operated in a similar manner to those at Smart View and Rocky Knob, but in the preliminary sketch for the Motor Service Station at Bluff Park, and in drawings for Rocky Knob, segregated bathroom facilities were included which did not comply with the terms of the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy.<sup>176</sup> However, later drawings of gas station at Rocky Knob reflected compliance to policy with the divisions of restrooms based only on sex. (Fig. 15).

Due to the growth of the Parkway and the expansion of services required to support the needs of its visitors, Superintendent Abbott remained apprehensive about the contract or contracts to be negotiated with potential concession operators. He also voiced his concerns about the current bid documents and whether potential bidders would understand the “policy” in place on the Parkway “governing accommodations for Negroes.” And although he was aware that the issue was being “restudied in Washington” and that potential changes to include provisions relating to such accommodations might be approved by the Director, he thought the documents should remain silent on the issue:

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<sup>176</sup> Abbott to File, Memorandum, June 28, 1940, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified Files, 1933-1949, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604 and BLRI Archives, RG 7, Series 41, Box 57, Folder 21.

This office favors the form submitted previously in broad terms as it is thought that the subject can better be discussed thoroughly while buildings are in the planning stage. From ranger reports it has been our experience to date that there have been very few Negro visitors on the Parkway, and not more than two picnic parties of Negroes have been reported in the two years of availability of these areas.<sup>177</sup>

Although no concessionaires had entered into agreements with the NPS, the bid process as advertised indicated that the NPS would award a 10-year contract to the winning bidder, whereby the concessionaire would establish, maintain and operate facilities that could include gasoline and service stations, food establishments, gift shops, and “such other services as are necessary in the judgment of the Secretary of the Interior for the convenience of visitors.” The bid advertisement in 1940 stated that “these facilities are to be operated under such regulations as may be prescribed by the Secretary of the Interior, including specifically the fixing of rates and the character and standard of services and accommodations” with the “primary purpose of the proposed contracts is to provide satisfactory services and adequate accommodations for all visitors to the said Parkway.”<sup>178</sup>

The boilerplate bid documents for concessions in both North Carolina and Virginia read exactly the same in 1940, with the documents requiring the approval by the SOI’s Office, and

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> *Blue Ridge Parkway News*, May 1940, Volume III, NARA, RG 79, Box 2715, Blue Ridge Parkway, 0-38 Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1934-1937.

they did, in fact, make reference to segregation practices. The cover sheet for the Bid Documents for Service 1940 VA indicated that all documents were “Approved as to Form and Substance” on July 3, 1940, by Under Secretary A.J. Wirtz. As part of the “Proposal” section in this document, there is reference that the construction of filling stations, coffee shops, and retail services at Smart View and Rocky Knob parks in Virginia, to be completed by May 1, 1941, would include “rest rooms for both races and sexes.” The Bid Documents for Service 1940 NC approved on May 14, 1940, included similar language when referring to the coffee shop to be built at Bluff Park, indicating that it would include “separate rest rooms for both races and sexes.” The contracts thereby did stipulate the segregation of races at least to some degree in the design as seen in plans and drawings and was supported by contract language. A form of contract was included with the bid documents that set out a provision relating to governing laws for the contract, which were specified to be the “laws of Congress” and not those promulgated by either state.<sup>179</sup> A noteworthy factor and one that suggests the level of confusion as to prevailing laws, in that the contract was regulated under federal law but prescribed segregation practices in existence under state laws.

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<sup>179</sup> National Park Service, Form Concession Contract (Bid Documents), NARA, RG 79, Box 2745, National Park Concession Folder.

Confirming Superintendent Abbott's understanding of and compliance to the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy as the Parkway developed, in the Annual Report dated June 30, 1940, regarding the "Provisions for Negroes," he wrote:

General plans for the development of recreational facilities for Negroes along the Parkway crystallized by your memorandum of April 26, 1939, and approved by the Secretary of Interior outlined a broad policy. Plans have been drawn accordingly, and the various developments will proceed as approved by you on the Master Plans of the Park, as funds become available, and as Negro use develops to that point which would justify initiation of the work. In the meanwhile joint use picnic areas and toilet facilities provide accommodations for Negroes in all of the four parks. Very few Negro visitors were reported using these facilities, however, during the past year.<sup>180</sup>

And going forward into 1941, the drawings accompanying the master plans showed the continued planning for a separate facility at Pine Spur, which is referenced as a "Negro Development Area," that was to include overnight cabins, a sandwich shop, and a picnic area. (Fig. 16, Fig. 17 and Fig. 18). In the Superintendent's Monthly Narrative dated February 6, 1941, then Acting Superintendent Sam P. Weems reported to Director Drury on what he described as new construction and specifically the progress made at Pine Spur, "this park is the first to be developed for the exclusive use of the Negroes."<sup>181</sup> Yet in 1941, Pine Spur remained

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<sup>180</sup> Abbott, Superintendent's Annual Report, June 30, 1940, BLRI Archives, electronic copy provided by Jackie Holt, National Park Service, Museum Curator.

<sup>181</sup> Weems, Superintendent's Monthly Report, February 6, 1941, NARA RG 79, Box 2718, Central Classified File 207.01.4-202.03.

incomplete.

The master plans also included a drawing for the overall development at Cumberland Knob, with a reference to a “Negro Picnic Area” as does one for Fishers Peak referring to it as a “Negro Combination Area,” where the site allocated for African Americans is located remotely from the other picnic area designated for White visitors which is conveniently located next to the beach. (Fig. 19 and Fig. 20). A drawing for Bluff Park provided for a “Joint Use Picnic Area” with its location a significant distance from the swimming pool, yet in close proximity to the gas station and sandwich shop, and a “Negro Combination Area” for camping purposes.<sup>182</sup> (Fig. 21).

The narrative of the master plan of 1941 goes into great detail regarding the completed facilities as well as those anticipated at the Parkway. In these descriptions, the amenities at the recreational parks were broken down into listings of picnic, trailer, and camping areas with a provision of units designated for Whites and African Americans. The concessions for gas and food were delineated in the same way. There were also provisions for naming the overlooks on the Parkway, identifying them by section, station, and the number of cars that could be parked at each, although not qualified specifically for White or African American use. But an indication of a generally-accepted norm is evident in the reference to one proposed overlook sited in

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<sup>182</sup> National Park Service, Master Plans Blue Ridge Parkway, RG 79 Master Plans, Blue Ridge Parkway, Cartographic Records 1896-1990.

North Carolina at Section 2E, Station 298, and referred to as “Nigger Mountain.”<sup>183</sup> Documents describing the overlooks including future master plans continued using this reference for years until a decision to change the name at some point in time during the 1940s. In an undated letter written to Mrs. Ed. M. Anderson, the editor of the *Skyline Post* in West Jefferson, North Carolina, Superintendent Weems stated that an interpretative sign was being prepared for this overlook, and that it would be referred to as “Negro Mountain” suggesting that this name change was a “logical change with time.”<sup>184</sup>

And later that year in a Monthly Report dated June 30, 1941, Acting Superintendent Weems described the work at Pine Spur as nearing completion and depicted that, “This attractive area, twenty-five miles south of Roanoke was developed for Negro use through the encouragement of the Negro Advisor for the Secretary.” At this point in time, Pine Spur had picnic tables and benches, a fireplace, a playfield, and a foot trails which made it likely that it could open for the 1941 summer season. In the meantime, the update reflected that “substantial progress was made” at Rocky Knob in the recreational facilities at the site, specifically the completion of five lodges, a recreation building, and wash houses. In this report, there was no reference made as to racially-segregated spaces at Rocky Knob, perhaps

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Weems to Anderson, Letter, undated, BLRI Archives, RG 5, Series 41, Box 51, 1950 Folder.

due to the potential for Pine Spur to open.<sup>185</sup>

Although prepared for the summer season from a standpoint of the availability of facilities for all visitors, an incident at Bluff Park drew the attention of NPS officials and confirmed that the segregation practices at the Parkway did not necessarily satisfy all parties. In a memorandum provided to Ranger Coombs by Park Warden R. Morrison King, the details of the Bluff Park episode were thoroughly documented. Warden King asserted that on July 28, 1941, approximately 30 African Americans arrived and began to utilize what was known as Picnic Area No. 3 at the park. Although African Americans were permitted to use certain facilities at Bluff Park, this was not the area so designated. The group was instructed by the watchman, Emerson Petty, that Picnic Area No. 1 was where “a portion has been set aside for use primarily by Negroes” and he instructed them to move to that location. These African American visitors refused to relocate which prompted the watchman to seek assistance from Warden King. Petty, with Warden King to support him, continued a discussion whereby they were asked by the group about the legal ramifications and/or course of action that would be taken if they remained at this picnic area in lieu of succumbing to Petty and Warden King’s request to move. They were informed that they would be cited for disorderly conduct and as

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<sup>185</sup> Weems, Superintendent’s Monthly Report, June 30, 1941. NARA RG 79, Box 2718, Central Classified File 207.01.4-202.03.

Warden King expressed, “they seemed pleased and were apparently eager to have the matter tried in Federal Court.” In the end, this group remained at Picnic Area No. 3 having stated that “since the ‘segregation of races is illegal out-of-doors’ they resented being ‘shoved around.’” Warden King recounted that “their final and most strongly emphasized point was their loyalty to the United States government . . . their spokesman stated emphatically that no Negro in the United States would stoop to sabotage, espionage, or other subversive activities” when it was suggested that they had planned the “entire affair.”<sup>186</sup>

Warden King also specified that during the exchange, White visitors intending to use the picnic area, upon seeing that it was occupied by African Americans, packed their cars and left the park. He also mentioned that this party of African Americans remained at the site and were “well behaved” and closed the memo in this way:

Bluff Park has had several groups of Negro picnickers so far this summer. All of them except this last group have cooperated with us in an excellent manner. However, in light of this episode I believe some definite arrangements must be made to take care of Negro picnickers or Bluff Park will come to be used by Negroes almost exclusively. At any rate patronage from local communities will drop off sharply.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> King to Coombs, Memorandum, July 28, 1941, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified Files, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

In late July 1941, two attorneys from Winston-Salem, North Carolina, W. Avery Jones and Hosea V. Price, sent a letter to Director Drury with a copy provided to Secretary Ickes about the occurrence at Bluff Park indicating that they were part of the group of African Americans involved in the incident. Jones and Price described the events of that day in much the same way Warden King had, indicating that they, as visitors to the Bluffs, attempted to picnic at the area and were approached by a watchman and later, the warden, and were told to move to utilize a "Negro" picnic area. Jones and Price stated that, as a group, they refused to relocate and requested to see the policy or order that barred them from using Picnic Area No. 3. In response, the Warden referred to a policy of the Parkway authority that "the Colored people must use only certain restricted facilities, the remainder being reserved for the use of Whites exclusively." Jones and Price relayed in their letter that they pressed further for a written document and when they asked to see the "order or law governing this matter," the Warden denoted that he was complying with verbal instructions provided to him by his superiors versus following a recorded document that could be produced. Jones and Price signified in the letter that its purpose was "to determine whether or not Blue Ridge Park has been given orders to deny the use of a large part of the facilities of the Park to Colored citizens and to confine their

use of the park to certain restricted areas only” and they requested that Director Drury provide a “ruling” on the matter.<sup>188</sup>

Director Drury did not respond to the letter, but Assistant Director Demaray did a few days later. He conveyed that the circumstances at the Bluffs, affecting the use of areas by African Americans, was limited to the joint use with Whites of one existing picnic area and that that would remain the situation until an exclusive picnic area for African Americans was built. Assistant Director Demaray represented that this position was in accord “with the policy which has been approved by the Secretary of the Interior for the development of the Blue Ridge Parkway which provides that at ‘The Bluffs’ one picnic area will be designated for use by Colored people only, one for use by White and Colored people, and one for use by White people only.”<sup>189</sup> A few days later, Secretary Ickes weighed in on the matter in a letter of his own to Jones and Price where he confirmed the procedures outlined by Assistant Director Demaray stating that they were reflective of an approved NPS policy, “Accordingly, a situation such as the Colored people from Winston-Salem experienced on July 27 should not develop again. This is in accordance with the policy which I have approved for the development of the

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<sup>188</sup> Jones and Price to Drury, Letter, July 28, 1941, NARA RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified Files, 1935-1944, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604.

<sup>189</sup> Demaray to Jones and Price, Letter, July 31, 1941, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified Files, 1935-1944, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604.

Blue Ridge Parkway.”<sup>190</sup>

Because confusion remained, for further clarification internally for those working on the Parkway, Superintendent Abbott sent a memorandum to Ranger Coombs that detailed who was permitted to use what facilities, not only at Bluff Park but also at Cumberland Knob. Superintendent Abbott set forth that the practice of a White only and some joint use at both sites would continue until additional picnic areas for the exclusive use of “Colored” people were built. Superintendent Abbott further noted that this would occur only if and when funding became available. A caveat was also included in that memo that read, “Please be guided accordingly and discuss this matter carefully with Mr. King [the Warden] and any others who may at times be left in charge of the area.”<sup>191</sup>

Superintendent Abbott wrote further memos on the topic for the staff at the Parkway and in one addressed to Ranger Garry, he detailed that these directives were reflective of “instructions from Washington regarding the joint use of picnic areas by Colored and White people.” Additionally, a reference was made to the still unopened area at Pine Spur with

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<sup>190</sup> Ickes to Jones and Price, Letter, August 5, 1941, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified Files, 1935-1944, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604 and NARA RG 48, Box 3791, Central Classified Files, 1937-1953, 12-0 Racial Discrimination (Part 2).

<sup>191</sup> Abbott to Coombs, Memorandum, August 6, 1941, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified Files, 1933-1949, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604.

Superintendent Abbott advising that until its completion, Ranger Garry's team should "advise courteously" the African American visitors where they should go and what facilities they should use.<sup>192</sup> At this time, Superintendent Abbott pointed out that he was following policy at the direction of the SOI, and Secretary Ickes indicated that the procedures at the Parkway followed that of the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy.

Acting Superintendent Weems prepared the Annual Report to the Director in 1941 and detailed the progress made that year in the development of recreational areas and specifically mentioned Pine Spur:

The development to near completion of this park in a single construction season has set a new standard of co-ordination and work accomplishment. Thorough preparation of all work plans well in advance contributed to the efficiency of the project. This attractive area, twenty-five miles south of Roanoke was developed for Negro use through the encouragement of the Negro Advisor to the Secretary. Work accomplished at this park during the past year included clean-up of woodlands, grading and crushed stone surfacing of entrance road, picnic loop road, and parking area in the vicinity of the proposed concession building. Twenty-five picnic units were installed consisting of table and benches, fireplace, and refuse cans. A playfield was largely completed, and several miles of foot trails were built.<sup>193</sup>

Also during this year, Acting Superintendent Abbott updated Regional Director Allen on

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<sup>192</sup> Abbott to Garry, Memorandum, August 11, 1941, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified Files, 1933-1949, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604.

<sup>193</sup> Weems, Superintendent's Annual Report, June 31, 1941, NARA, RG 79, Box 2717, Central Classified Files, 206-207.01.

the development of Picnic Area No. 2 at Bluff Park, the one designated for exclusive use by large crowds of locals. He explained the need for requisite clearances from him due to the atypical amenities that were planned for the park and also described that because parks and sites were already overpopulated on the weekends due to local use by large school, church, and family groups, that a playground and ballfield should be added. Acting Superintendent Abbott asserted that a softball diamond and playground would provide “an important means of decoying these group picnickers from use of the rest of the picnic area” to be utilized by “through” visitors.”<sup>194</sup> Regional Director Allen responded by sending a note to Director Demaray with concerns that if accommodations of this type were approved, that it would encourage greater use by locals stating, “The demand for such facilities increases use of them which increases demand for more etc. I believe local use justifies no special items.”<sup>195</sup> Director Demaray countered that sentiment and encouraged Regional Director Allen to provide for the needs of the local park visitors “as long as the demand exists” and to approve the plans because of the “special conditions” that existed and to consider any future developments accordingly.<sup>196</sup> Regional Director Allen wrote later that year to Acting Superintendent Abbott

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<sup>194</sup> Abbott to Allen, Memorandum, September 26, 1941, NARA, RG 79, Box 2728, Central Classified File 501-504.4.

<sup>195</sup> Allen to Demaray, Handwritten Note, October 3, 1941, NARA, RG 79, Box 2728, Central Classified File 501-504.4.

<sup>196</sup> Demaray to Allen, Memorandum, October 4, 1941, NARA, RG 79, Box 2728, Central Classified File, 501-504.4 and Demaray to Allen, Memorandum, October 9, 1941, NARA, RG 79, Box 2728, Central Classified File, 501-504.4.

for a similar issue with regard to non-typical amenities at the park at Rocky Knob. In this correspondence, Regional Director Allen questioned the intent of the request implying that instead of servicing the needs of Parkway visitors, it would instead establish an RDA-like facility with likened to a group camp.<sup>197</sup> Whether these appeals for atypical amenities to be located at the Bluff Park and/or Rocky Knob specifically related to use by White or African American visitors cannot be determined from the correspondence, yet it should be noted that the issue of funding was not mentioned anywhere in the exchange and the request for authorization of these amenities was directly related to need. In the meantime, the need for a separate facility for African Americans at Pine Spur had long been proven and discussed, yet that park remained unopened.

#### **Parkway: Adoption of the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy**

Because the institution of the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy was said not to have caused significant problems at Shenandoah, in May of 1942, Director Drury forwarded a memorandum to Superintendent Abbott and stated that the “non-segregation practices inaugurated at Shenandoah” would be extended to all NPS sites located in the Southern states. Director Drury provided instruction that the practices on non-segregation should “follow closely

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<sup>197</sup> Allen to Abbott, Memorandum, November 10, 1941, NARA, RG 79, Box 2728, Central Classified File, 501-504.4.

the policy approved by Secretary Ickes on 5/12/39," again referring to the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy. In that memo, Director Drury provided clarification as to what was decided at Shenandoah, i.e. that the picnic and campgrounds areas were opened to everyone, but in addition, facilities had been developed at Lewis Mountain that were used exclusively by African Americans. Director Drury also quoted a letter written by Secretary Ickes to the NPS Office of Facts and Figures on the matter:

For several years I have been working with leaders of the Negro race in Washington to open up national park and monument areas in the Southern States to Negroes. In the Shenandoah National Park we experimented with several picnic areas and have had no serious complaint. I expect to extend this non-discriminatory policy to other areas as rapidly as possible. I am glad to see that your office has turned its attention to this worthwhile problem in American life, and I shall do everything to cooperate. I consider the treatment of minorities in America to be one of the greatest tests of our democracy.<sup>198</sup>

Director Demaray based his decision to advance this policy to include the Parkway on evidence provided to him in a memorandum dated June 3, 1942, from R. Taylor Hoskins, Shenandoah's superintendent. Hoskins wrote that the policy was put into effect at Shenandoah in 1940 and stated that due to the changes required, "Orders were issued to all our personnel explaining the policy of the Park Service that no discrimination should be made

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<sup>198</sup> Drury to Abbott, Memorandum, May 26, 1942, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified File, 1933-1949, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604.

among any of the Park visitors.” He added, “The adoption of the policy of non-discrimination has not led to any criticism so far as I have known.” Hoskins did, however, mention that most of the “Negro visitors” to Shenandoah, specifically at the popular Mammoth Cave area, were those employed by White visitors in the capacity of maid or driver, and that when overnight accommodations were needed, these African Americans stayed and dined with the “Negro help” in the hotel dormitory.<sup>199</sup> It is important to note that at this time, “no discrimination” meant the opening of picnic and overnight accommodations to African Americans, yet the creation of separate-but-equal facilities remained in accordance with the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy which did not afford complete desegregation of facilities.

Simultaneously with the decision to invoke the policy, Director Drury requested from Superintendent Abbott the facts and figures on the use of Parkway facilities by African Americans. In a memorandum dated May 29, 1942, Acting Superintendent Abbott provided those statistics to Director Drury and that response revealed that by this date, construction at Pine Spur had continued with picnic units, pit toilets and a playfield built and ready for use, and facilities including a sandwich shop and comfort station were anticipated, but due to travel

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<sup>199</sup> Hoskins to Drury, Memorandum, June 3, 1942, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified File, 1933-1949, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604.

conditions along the Parkway, it had yet to open. Confirming the equality of this separate park, he commented, “We desire to point out that we consider the Pine Spur area one of the most attractive on the entire Parkway and comparable in development in every way with our other recreational developments.” Superintendent Abbott then presented the specifics as to Smart View and Rocky Knob where African Americans were “accommodated” but no facilities were constructed for their specific use. At Cumberland Knob, he confirmed that the custom was to have park staff direct African Americans to areas designated for their use, but that the concessions and comfort stations were used jointly by both races. The development of exclusive picnic areas for African Americans at the Bluffs was mentioned again with a tentative completion date forecasted as June 30, 1942, thereby indicating that this area would supplement the existing two picnic areas, the one designated for Whites only and the other designated for joint use.<sup>200</sup>

Superintendent Abbott then referenced the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy and the Abbott 1940 Parkway Policy Clarification as the “general policy” on segregation at the Parkway. Procedures were given to Parkway personnel as to how they should handle the issue of use,

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<sup>200</sup> Abbott to Drury, Memorandum, May 29, 1942, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified File, 1933-1949, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604.

wherein Superintendent Abbott instructed them to “show the Negroes the same courtesy and hospitality as are shown any other race” all while directing them to the areas allocated for their specific use. Superintendent Abbott confirmed that no signage existed at the Parkway designating White or Negro use and he stated that it was “not considered desirable to emphasize such segregation” as detailed in Director Drury’s earlier memo. He did express however, that confusion remained on the signage issue and wondered if in comfort stations specified for joint use, like those at the Cumberland Knob concessions, whether the use of signage within the comfort stations “would be desirable.” In closing, Superintendent Abbott verified that practices would be carried out on the Parkway in compliance to the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy, and requested that if any changes were anticipated he be informed so that he could “adjust accordingly.”<sup>201</sup> After reviewing Superintendent Abbott’s memo, Director Drury confirmed that the practices at the Parkway complied with policy and praised his work stating, “An analysis of your memorandum shows that you have carefully followed the policy established by the Secretary.” He urged Superintendent Abbott to continue operating under

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<sup>201</sup> Abbott to Drury, Memorandum, May 29, 1942, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified File, 1933-1949, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604.

the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy as he had supplemented with the Abbott 1940 Parkway Policy Clarification.<sup>202</sup>

In the introduction of the Superintendent's Annual Report written in 1942, there is a sentence that referenced conformity to the "Departmental policy established during 1939 to insure a complete opportunity for recreation of Negroes using the Parkway and parks was closely followed during the past year." That introduction included information relating to park usage that reflected the statistics gathered on "Negro visitation" and provided a notation that "no problems of any proportion were occasioned by joint use of the several areas where it was provided for" except for the one complaint at Bluff Park. This was the incident involving the group led by Jones and Price. Work done at each park was enumerated in the "Progress in Development of Various Areas" section with specific reference to those areas providing facilities for use by African Americans. By this time Pine Spur was said to be "nearly completed for Negro use," yet it still had not opened. Rocky Knob's development of a "Negro picnic area" was postponed awaiting an analysis of need and a determination of the availability of a work force to construct it. The work at Bluff Park included a singular development, that being a

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<sup>202</sup> Drury to Abbott, Memorandum, June 15, 1942, NARA, RG 79, Box 2737, Central Classified File, 1933-1949, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, 601-604.

“temporary Negro picnic area,” with all other work cancelled and “not seen as immediately necessary, and therefore the preponderance of ERA forces now working in this park will be transferred to much needed Parkway landscape development.”<sup>203</sup> This entry is peculiar considering the assurances made to Jones and Price in the quick responses made by NPS officials to the episode that occurred a year prior that a picnic area designated for the exclusive use of African Americans was anticipated.

Superintendent Abbott made another plea for the establishment of contracts for concessions along the Parkway indicating that the public needs remained unserved:

Through the past year, the rangers and others contacting the public have continued to be impressed with visitor restlessness at the lack of good eating facilities and gasoline stations on the Parkway. Despite emphasis in the Parkway pamphlet and general publicity the through tourist comes unprepared. He seems reluctant to turn off the Parkway for gasoline at state highway crossings. Your planning staff is, therefore, more than ever convinced of the need for early provision of both gas and food at planned intervals along the Parkway as travel conditions again ease. It is hoped that work may be started with National Park Concessions upon plans for these facilities well in advance of the return of normal travel and the Parkway made ready to receive the post-war visitors.<sup>204</sup>

Late in 1941, Director Demaray had already informed Secretary Ickes that public concession facilities were needed on the Parkway, specifically at Smart View and Rocky Knob in Virginia

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<sup>203</sup> Abbott, Superintendent’s Annual Report, June 30, 1942, NARA, RG 79, Box 2717, Central Classified File, 206-207.01.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

and at Bluff Park in North Carolina. Director Demaray promoted that these facilities be developed and run by National Concessions, Inc., an entity established on June 21, 1941, to specifically operate facilities in national park areas (National Concessions).<sup>205</sup> And so, commencing on January 1, 1942, National Concessions was authorized by the NPS to operate all facilities on the Parkway for a term of 20 years, but for the Peaks of Otter area which had its own concessionaire known as Peaks of Otter, Inc.<sup>206</sup> The organization of National Concessions had been approved by Secretary Ickes and its initial board was comprised of five directors, two of whom were employees of the NPS, Director Demaray and A.J. Knox, however, it was stipulated that they were not to receive salaries for this service.<sup>207</sup> The contract as executed with National Concessions included the boilerplate contract language relating to services provided to visitors on the Parkway, mirroring what had been approved by the NPS in 1940 that included the segregation of facilities based on race. This sanctioning of segregation in compliance to state laws and customs is remarkable not only from a contractual standpoint, but

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<sup>205</sup> Demaray to Ickes, Memorandum, December 16, 1941, NARA, RG 79, Box 147, Central Classified File, 1933-1949, General, 0-201-15.

<sup>206</sup> Abbott, Superintendent's Annual Report, June 30, 1942, NARA, RG 79, Box 2717, Central Classified File, 206-207.01 and Drury to National Parks Concessions, Inc., Letter, March 31, 1944, NARA, RG 79, Box 147, Central Classified File, 1933-1949, General, 0-201-15.

<sup>207</sup> National Park Service, Department of Interior Concession Policies in Areas Administrated by the National Park Service, March 16, 1944, NARA, RG 79, Box 145, Central Classified File, 1933-1949, General, 0-201.15.

also due to the fact that this endorsement resulted from the activities of an organization formed by and directed by a federal agency.

### **Parkway: Movement to a Desegregation Policy**

Although the offices of the Regional Director had received Director Drury's mandate on June 15, 1942, that all facilities in the Southern states were to be administered on a non-segregated basis, this desegregation policy did not appear to be disseminated nor in effect at the Parkway, where procedure continued to comply with the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy, perhaps due to a lack of directive from Regional Director Allen himself. As late as 1944, he wrote that the issue of jurisdiction remained the bedrock in Southern regions that permitted state law to prevail, "Since there has been no cession of jurisdiction by the respective States over the Government lands within the above park and monuments [referring to Grand Canyon National Park], and the State laws are in force and effect within the park and monuments so far as the application of such laws does not interfere with the protection, use, and control of lands by the United States for park and monument purposes." He described that federal law would prevail at NPS sites if Congress authorized "the issuance of rules and regulations which have the force of law." Regional Director Allen added that the federal government's power remained "to protect its property" and would not be diminished by the "laws of the State wherein such

property may be situated.” He provided this analysis relating to gaming laws, yet the reference could be interpreted in a broader context from the standpoint of laws in force to protect government property and could reflect his mindset with regard to state versus federal law prevailing.<sup>208</sup> And without an act of Congress determining that the NPS in the Southern Region be desegregated, Regional Director Allen may have believed that jurisdiction remained with the states that, at the time, operated under Jim Crow segregation laws.

The Annual Reports of the Superintendent for the next two years, 1943 and 1944, do not make reference to issues relating to abidance with policy. More than likely the issue of segregation/non-segregation was not at hand due the fact that wartime restrictions invoked a ban on pleasure driving that resulted in diminished use of the Parkway. During those years, however, statistics relating to the demographics of those visitors that managed to use the Parkway were provided and included designation of race, and for African Americans, those numbers were extremely low.<sup>209</sup>

The Annual Report written in 1945 reflected that following the war, there was an increase in use of the recreation areas on the Parkway and that many of these areas remained

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<sup>208</sup> National Park Service, Region One Circular, December 12, 1944, NARA, RG 79, Box 731, Central Classified File, 1933-1949, Regional Offices, Region 1, 602-631.1.

<sup>209</sup> Abbott, Superintendent’s Annual Report, June 30, 1943 and Abbott, Superintendent’s Annual Report, June 30, 1944, BLRI Archives, electronic copy provided by Jackie Holt, National Park Service, Museum Curator.

in need of additional concessions facilities. In the “Publicity” section of that report, suggestions were made as to how to increase the number of visitors, recommending that the Parkway should be promoted as an option for pleasure travel through ad campaigns that would utilize the press, travel organizations, and travel publications. Superintendent Abbott stated, “We shall make a determined effort during the year to increase our file of suitable photographs, to release stories about the Parkway to newspapers along the way, and to stir interest in the Blue Ridge Parkway as an entity of the National Park System.”<sup>210</sup> Those efforts, no doubt, had an effect, as the 1946 Annual Report reflected that the Parkway experienced a “post-war boom” of increased visitation due to the number of stories written in *House and Garden*, *Look*, *Holiday*, and other popular magazines of the time. The Parkway was also promoted through travel organizations like the American Automobile Association, and due to corporate advertisements as companies like Esso Oil negotiated with the NPS for gasoline concessions.<sup>211</sup> Although technically desegregation was instituted on the Parkway due to Director Drury’s edict in 1942, the promotion of its use did not appear to be emphasized to African Americans, as none of the archived ephemera, including publications, brochures, or photographs reflect any images of

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<sup>210</sup> Abbott, Superintendent’s Annual Report, June 30, 1945 and Weems, Superintendent’s Annual Report, July 18, 1946, BLRI Archives, electronic copy provided by Jackie Holt, National Park Service, Museum Curator.

<sup>211</sup> Weems, Annual Report, July 18, 1946, BLRI Archives, electronic copy provided by Jackie Holt, National Park Service, Museum Curator.

African Americans enjoying the Parkway. (Fig. 22, Fig. 23, and Fig. 24). This lack of inclusion in the promotion of the Parkway was consistent with established behavior as demonstrated by the mention of “neglect” when reporting on the developments along the Parkway in the Summer 1941 edition of the *Blue Ridge Parkway News*, “a bulletin of popular information for parkway neighbors along the Blue Ridge.” That newsletter mentioned a new picnic area at Pine Spur:

A number have asked questions about the construction near Pine Spur, and checking up on our past issues we find that the *NEWS* has neglected this new picnic area – closest of all to Roanoke from whence comes many a picnicker each week end. The work has been under way as part of the W.P.A. program since late fall. The park was 75% complete as of July 1, which closed out our fiscal construction period. Paving of the roads and parking areas and construction of water supply and sewage system remain to be accomplished and will be set up if we have funds this summer. The area will be put in use by next spring. Meanwhile, we have barricades at the entrance and ask that you spread your lunches at Smart View which is all in readiness twelve miles south on the Parkway.<sup>212</sup>

By 1946, it appears that the terms of the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy remained in effect as evidenced by a memorandum dated March 18, 1946, written to the Regional Director Allen by Superintendent Weems. In this memo, Superintendent Weems made an appeal for the resources to complete the work at Pine Spur so that it could be opened in compliance with

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<sup>212</sup> *Blue Ridge Parkway News*, Volume IV, July-August 1941, Number 6, BLRI Archives, BLRI Parkway News 1937 – 1943.

the original intent of Secretary Ickes as suggested by the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy. As in the past when lobbying for funding at Pine Spur, Superintendent Abbott commented, "It is our belief that Pine Spur, one of our most attractive areas, will ultimately be open to the White visitors, as we feel that there will not be enough Negro visitors to justify its maintenance exclusively for that purpose."<sup>213</sup> Yet the issue of what was policy and the specific procedures in effect seemed to be a question that Superintendent Weems was working on with NPS officials. In April of 1946, Regional Director Abbott sent a memo to Superintendent Weems that provided a review of several issues at the Parkway, including park operator problems, maps, employee housing, the location of headquarters, and specifics as to local use at Cumberland Knob. Due to the fact that "local" use often resulted in exceeding the desired maximum capacity at Cumberland Knob, he stated it would be favorable to get Pine Spur opened to alleviate the overuse at Cumberland Knob:

Your feeling and mine that it is idle under existing regulations to continue to think of Pine Spur as an all-Negro development parallels Mr. Emerson's opinion. He suggests that Pine Spur development be carried in the priority lists just as any other recreational area would be that will be open for the use of all. Presumably the once-proposed all-Negro sections within Rocky Knob and Pine Spur can be almost forgotten unless specifically resurrected due to actual experience during the forthcoming season with operation of facilities we now have available for use of Negroes and Whites alike. I would like to discuss this entire matter with you as I feel that you should point out

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<sup>213</sup> Weems to Regional Director, Memorandum, March 18, 1946, BLRI Archives, RG 5, Series 8, Box 9, Folder 2.

officially that there are portions of the now approved Master Plan which under new regulations it seems unwise to carry out. This is clearly a matter of policy in which the Regional Director and the Director would be interested.”<sup>214</sup>

On April 26, 1946, Superintendent Weems wrote to Horace W. Peaslee an architectural consultant to the NPS who had prepared plans and drawings for the development of the gas station at Bluff Park. This letter referred to those plans and the proposed segregated facilities designated for use by concession employees at this location. According to Superintendent Weems, the space designed could be reduced and the drawings modified because he did not anticipate the concessionaire having any African American employees:

We continue to be unfavorably impressed with the relatively large space allowed for toilet and shower facilities for help as contrasted with the economy of space afforded the toilets for the public. We wonder whether this point should not again be discussed with the concessionaire to see whether this space can be reduced by any means. We feel that there is a good chance that there will be no Colored applicants in this mountain section.<sup>215</sup>

This remark does not indicate that desegregation was the policy, but rather that segregation of facilities would remain in effect if there was a specific need to accommodate African Americans.

By 1948, there is evidence desegregation was promoted by the NPS in the operations at the Parkway as seen in a letter from Acting Director Hillory A. Tolson to the concessionaire

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<sup>214</sup> Abbott to Weems, Memorandum, April 26, 1946, BLRI Archives, RG 3, Series, 16, Box 89, Folder 34.

<sup>215</sup> Weems to Peaslee, Letter, April 29, 1946, BLRI Archives, RG 3, Series 16, Box 89, Folder 39.

operating the Peaks of Otter park. In confirming a contract extension, Acting Director Tolson referenced an additional provision to be adhered to going forward that included nondiscrimination language regarding employment and desegregation in the use of facilities:

The Concessioner and its employees shall not discriminate because of race, creed, color or national origin against (a) any employee or applicant for employment, or (b) any person by refusing to furnish such person any accommodation, facility, services, or privilege offered to or enjoyed by the general public. The Concessioner and its employees shall not publicize the accommodations, facilities, services, or privileges in any manner that would directly or inferentially reflect upon or question the acceptability of the patronage of any person because of race, creed, color, or national origin. The Concessioner shall include and require compliance with a provision similar to this provision in any subcontract made with respect to the privileges herein granted.

The actual contract enclosed with Acting Director Tolson's letter was approved on July 30, 1948, by J. A. King, the Secretary of the Interior at the time.<sup>216</sup> This action confirmed what Solicitor Indritz had opined almost a decade earlier relating to the concession contracts at Shenandoah that the terms of a policy change approved by the SOI could affect existing contracts and be reflected in a subsequent amendment.

However, the issue of compliance with a desegregation policy remained perplexing as other documentation supports that the principles of the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy

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<sup>216</sup> Tolson to Peaks of Otter, Inc., Letter, July 18, 1948, NARA, RG 79, Box 2746, Central Classified File, 1933-1949, National Parkways, Blue Ridge, Peaks of Otter, 900.05-901.

continued at the Parkway through the 1950. In his Monthly Report for February 1950, Superintendent Weems recapped the activities on the Parkway and specified that he and the Landscape Architect had participated in a conference with the Board of Supervisors of Bedford County, Virginia relating to the “preliminary planning of a proposed recreational area for Negroes on lands of the Jefferson National Forest.”<sup>217</sup> The NPS was still administratively involved in the planning of RDAs and due to the proximity of this project to the Parkway, Superintendent Weems and members of his staff assisted in the planning of it. Here it is clear that the creation of a separate RDAs to segregate the races was condoned by the NPS.

Other documents reveal that some efforts toward desegregation began on the Parkway in the mid-1940s in the aftermath of World War II. In a memorandum dated May 7, 1952, addressed to the Regional Director from Acting Superintendent J. Carlisle Crouch, Pine Spur’s history was enumerated in addressing the potential to open the park:

The area has had mostly bad breaks from the very start. We had land acquisition troubles and finally ended with only part of the area acquired, two tracts of which are isolated. Several years ago development was started to provide a place for Negroes but before that could be finished non-segregation was established and then the war stopped all work. Several years ago we removed all tables and obliterated the connection to the Parkway motor road to keep people out.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Weems to Director, Letter, March 13, 1950, NARA, RG 79, Box 0129, Administrative Files, 1949-1971, Superintendent’s Monthly Reports, July 1949-December 31, 1951 Folder.

<sup>218</sup> Crouch to Regional Director, Memorandum, May 7, 1952.

Although Acting Superintendent Crouch referred to “non-segregation,” he, no doubt, was referring to “desegregation” of parks and facilities at the Parkway as the NPS 1939 Non-Segregation Policy would have allowed for a separate, but equal, area for African Americans. Nonetheless, despite the slowdown in Parkway activities due to the War, it is curious that Pine Spur which was completed and ready for use, as evidenced in reports dating back to 1942, had never opened. Yet in 1952, Acting Superintendent Crouch was lobbying for its use due to the completion of additional sections of the Parkway resulting in “a need for the activation of this area,” not for use by African Americans exclusively, but for Parkway visitors in general.<sup>219</sup> In the end, Pine Spur never opened perhaps because of the desegregation policy as both Whites and African Americans could jointly use all recreational areas along the Parkway.

As desegregation of Parkway facilities was evidenced and tested, the NPS received letters of complaint not only from African Americans who were discriminated against at its sites, but also with the concerns of White visitors who felt that their right to enjoyment of the areas had been violated. In correspondence addressed to Superintendent Weems, Alfred Percy, an individual from Madison Heights, Virginia, wrote of an “unpleasant experience” that transpired on October 10, 1952, in the Bedford-Botecourt area of the Parkway near the Peaks

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

of Otter. As detailed by Percy, the incident occurred when he and his family stopped at the Peaks of Otter overlook so that he could take photographs that would be included in a book he was writing about the Parkway. Percy stated that because a group of African Americans “descended upon” them at the overlook, he was not only barred from taking photographs, but his family was “crowded” and unable to enjoy the site. Although Percy described the “eight Negroes” as “quiet, talked well, dressed well,” he perceived their actions as rude or intended to support some sort of civil rights demonstration and demanded to know what Superintendent Weems was doing about these types of situations. Percy also provided a copy of his letter to the local newspaper.<sup>220</sup> Superintendent Weems responded quickly acknowledging the complaint and offered his sympathy for the behavior that Percy and his family experienced. He also replied that this incident was “the first serious criticism of them” [referring to African Americans] and explained that “Negro groups” had become more prevalent visitors to this area of the Parkway in recent years. Superintendent Weems advised Percy that in going forward, if anything of this nature were to happen again, that he should immediately inform and get aid from one of the park rangers. He also made a request that Percy provide the license plate number of the car driven by the “Negro party” in the event he had recorded such

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<sup>220</sup> Percy to Weems, Letter, August 16, 1952, NARA, RG 79, Box 0363, Administrative Files, 1949-1971, Complaints by Park.

information.<sup>221</sup> In a memorandum to Director Wirth from Superintendent Weems as part of his Monthly Report for October of 1952, there is a reference to this situation indicating that a complaint had been lodged. Although the entry is written objectively about Percy's experience, Superintendent Weems also denoted concern due to the fact that Percy had sent a copy of the letter to the newspaper, was writing a book, and had been "a long-time friend of the Parkway."<sup>222</sup>

Correspondence from politicians also addressed prevailing sentiment towards desegregation of NPS sites in the South with many expressing the need to keep Southern customs intact. As seen in one letter written in 1950 by United States House Representative William M. Tuck from Virginia to the NPS Director, Tuck voiced his disapproval of the potential for the integration of races at overnight accommodations at the Parkway stating that the citizens of his state would not tolerate desegregation and admonishing the NPS for even considering it. Director Wirth responded to Tuck by stating that the NPS was bound by contract not to discriminate.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Weems to Percy, Letter, August 27, 1952, NARA, RG 79, Box 0363, Administrative Files, 1949-1971, Complaints by Park.

<sup>222</sup> Weems to Director, Memorandum, September 12, 1951, NARA RG 79, Box 0129, Administrative Files, 1949-1971, Superintendent's Monthly Reports, January 1, 1952 – December 31, 1955 Folder.

<sup>223</sup> Quin, 171.

Similar to the research findings of Bruggeman with regard to Washington Birthplace and of Devlin relating to Shenandoah, the documents and records referencing the Parkway indicate that some form of segregation policy was officially sanctioned during its design, development and operation, yet confusion existed and opinions differed as to how to administer it. Because the factors specific to the Parkway mirror the findings at Washington Birthplace and Shenandoah, it is likely that in-depth studies of other Southern parks and sites will reveal similar results.

### **5.1.2 Interviews**

Based on the information discovered from analysis of the above-referenced studies and questions formulated as a result of all research, it was anticipated that interviews would be conducted with individuals having direct knowledge of the history of the Parkway and the interpretations that have been offered to its visitors over time. The intent of these interviews was to aid in determining what recommendations should be made to the NPS about the inclusion of this history of segregation in the planning, development and operation of the Parkway's recreational areas in its management documents, National Register documentation, and/or interpretative narrative for the Parkway in general.

A general request for participation in these interviews was made in April and May of

2017, wherein three NPS personnel agreed to participate, with those potential participants requesting a draft of this study prior to those interviews. In March of 2018, a draft of this study was sent to those four (4) potential participants along with one (1) other individual working for the NPS at the Parkway headquarters. Follow-up emails have been sent to all personnel requesting feedback and scheduling information in order to conduct those interviews. As of the date of this study, none of the potential participants has responded and/or agreed to be interviewed. Due to these circumstances and lack of response, no interviews were conducted as part of this study. As a result, recommendations of NPS personnel will not be included in this study and will be based singularly on the findings of this researcher. These recommendations are set out below.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

### **5.2.1 Amendments to Management Documents**

As early as 1948, NPS leadership encouraged that narratives be prepared and included in the Parkway's management documents that reflected both the significance and the general themes surrounding its development.<sup>224</sup> As time went on, short histories detailing early

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<sup>224</sup> Drury to Region One Director, Memorandum, April 2, 1948, NARA, RG 79, Records of Drury, Box 03, Atwater Kent Foundation, 1948-50 to C, 1940-1951.

tourism, i.e. factors relating to inns and hotels, keepers, and concessions, were requested and prepared to accompany the overall administrative history so that this information could be included in the general reports being compiled by the NPS relating to its national parks, monuments, historical areas and memorials. These publications included not only a national history that focused on the events of the Colonial period and how the white man developed the land, but also specific history relating to the establishment of the evolution of policies, development and use, and the interpretative program at each site.<sup>225</sup> As a result, over time, the general reports and specific management documents at each site, including those relating to the Parkway, have reflected this history and created a vast amount of information and volumes of documents.<sup>226</sup>

Without an opportunity to review each and every management document or to speak with NPS personnel more familiar with these materials, it is impossible to definitively say that the history of segregation practices influenced by Jim Crow laws with regard to the planning, design and operation of the Parkway has been included in management documents over the

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<sup>225</sup> Cox to Region One Superintendents, Memorandum, September 3, 1954, BLRI Archives, RG 5, Series 41, Box 51, Folder 16.

<sup>226</sup> Blue Ridge Parkway, Virginia and North Carolina, Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact State, January 2013, 1-172

course of time. However, if this specific information has not been included, a great opportunity exists for the NPS to strategize in its management documents on how to capture this history in future Parkway-related reports and studies and/or include it in a potential National Register nomination. There is also the prospect for the NPS to orchestrate the conveyance of this history to the general public and the Parkway's visitors through inclusion of this theme in its interpretative planning.

### **5.2.2 *Expansion of Long Range Interpretative Plan***

According to the Parkway's planning documents, interpretative themes should describe ideas, concepts, or messages about the Parkway deemed significant and those of great importance to all visitors. Once themes are determined, the NPS is tasked with how they are relayed to the general public and/or to visitors along the Parkway with options including media in the form of brochures, signage, markers; activities in classroom settings or in the form of reenactments; or through the use of or preservation of actual facilities.<sup>227</sup> The long-range interpretative plan for the Parkway published in 2002 specifically enumerates recommendations for relaying the theme relating to the design and construction of the

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<sup>227</sup> National Park Service, Long-Range Interpretative Plan Blue Ridge Parkway 2002, Department of Interior, National Park Service, Blue Ridge Parkway, Branch of Interpretation, Harpers Ferry Center Interpretative Planning, p. 9.

Parkway, and that plan also provides strategies to accomplish the interpretation suggesting the use of facilities located at the Parkway's first recreation area, Cumberland Knob. Linn Cove Visitor's Center is another site mentioned as well due to the space available that could house exhibits and the open areas that could accommodate classroom settings where visitors could be educated.<sup>228</sup>

The intention to relay and the means to present varied thematic interpretations exist at the Parkway and these efforts could certainly be enhanced by including the history of how segregation practices in the states of Virginia and North Carolina influenced by Jim Crow laws had an overall effect on the planning, design and operation of ultimately all of the recreation areas along the Parkway. A comprehensive review of the interpretative planning documents by NPS personnel may produce additional opportunities to weave this narrative into other locations along the Parkway.

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<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 *Conclusion***

Because the NPS has not yet sufficiently documented its policies and practices with regard to the creation of segregated facilities in its Southern parks and sites, revealing and communicating this history is long overdue. This study brings a more complex and difficult history to light that could aid the NPS in recounting events of the past that will pique the interest of many Americans, but particularly an underserved population, African Americans. In doing so, knowledge of an inclusive history can be disseminated that has the potential to change how NPS sites are viewed, thereby providing an opportunity to potentially increase the number of, as well as diversify the race and ethnicity of, visitors to its sites.

### **6.2 *Recommendations for Further Research***

This study lays the foundation for additional research that could provide insight into segregation policies and practices through the Jim Crow and modern civil rights eras at other NPS parks and sites and encourages further research to ensure that the NPS includes a variety of interpretations at these sites so that the stories of *all* Americans can be included as part of its history.

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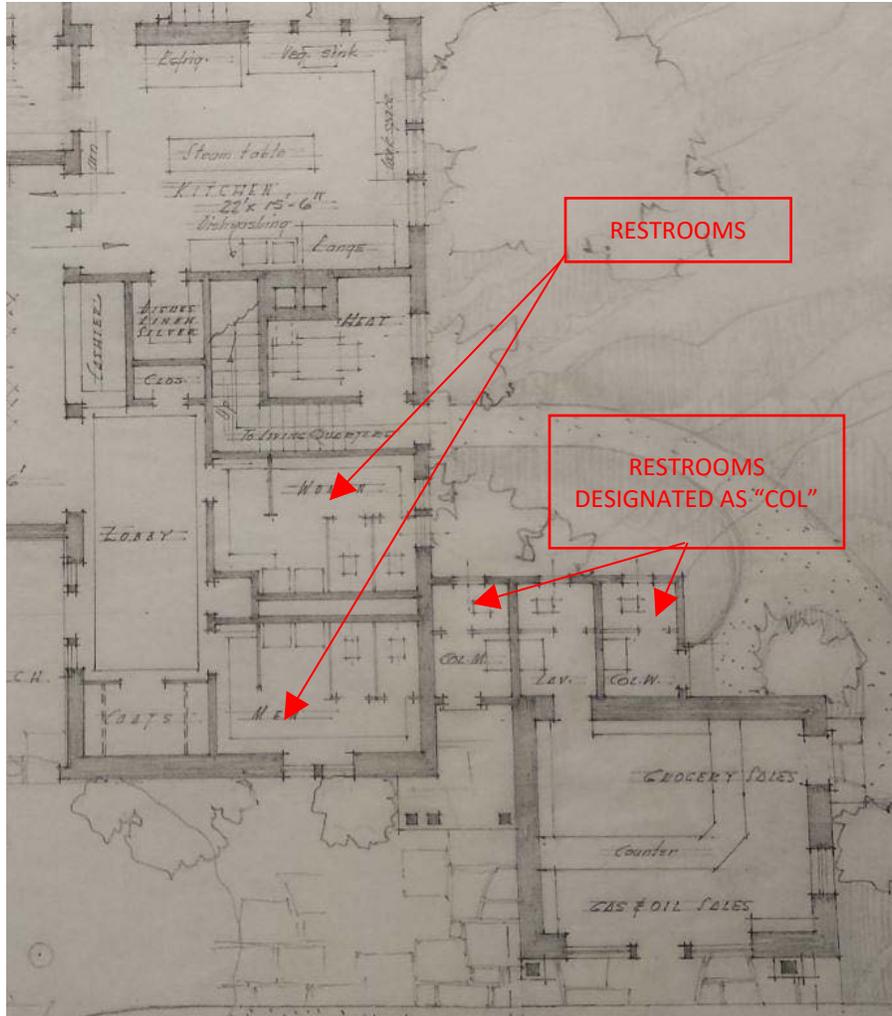


Figure 1: Drawing of Typical Gasoline Station - Racially Segregated Restrooms (BLRI Archives -PKY-BR-RK-2020)

SCALE : 1" = 40' CONT. INT. = 2 FEET	
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE BRANCH OF PLANS AND DESIGN <small>PREPARED BY</small> ROANOKE <small>OFFICE</small>	REGION ONE
TOPOGRAPHY - NEGRO AREA <small>NAME OF JOB</small> PINE SPUR PARK <small>LOCATION</small> BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY <small>NAME OF PARK OR MONUMENT</small>	SHEET 2 OF 2 DRAWING NO. PKY-BR PS-5361

Figure 2: Title Sheet of Pine Spur Topography Drawing (BLRI ARCHIVES PKY-BR-PS-5361)



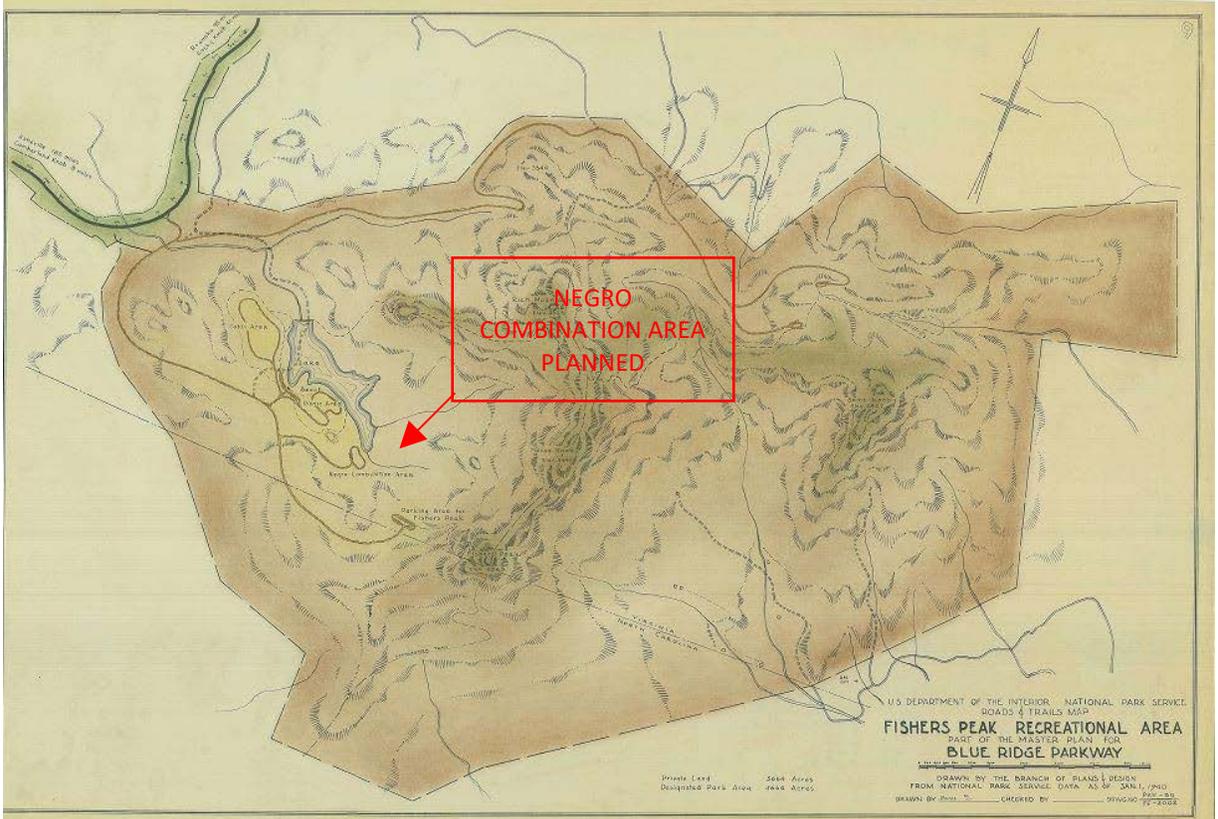


Figure 4: Master Plan Drawing of Fishers Peak (NARA – PKY-BR-FP-2002)

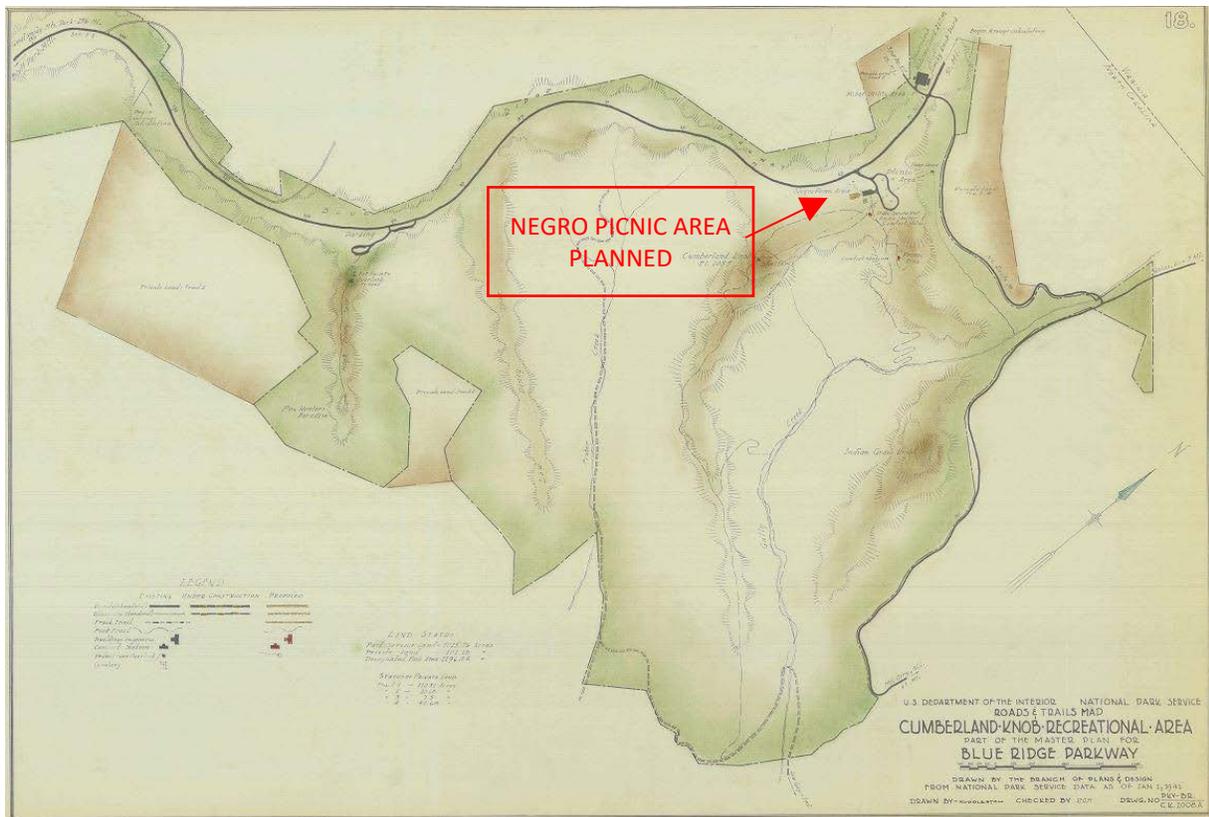


Figure 5: Master Plan Drawing of Cumberland Knob (BLRI Archives PKY-BR-CK-2028)

SCALE 1" = 100'

<p>UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE</p> <p>PROJECT : LD-NC-11 PREPARED BY WILKESBORO, NC. OFFICE</p>	<p>REGION <i>ONE</i></p>
<p><i>COLORED PICNIC AREA</i></p> <p>NAME OF JOB <i>BLUFF PARK</i> LOCATION <i>BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY</i> NAME OF PARK OR MONUMENT</p>	<p>SHEET <i>1</i> OF <i>1</i></p> <p>DRAWING NO. <i>PKY-BR-BL</i> <i>5394</i></p>

U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE 6-5711

Figure 6: Title Sheet of Bluff Park Colored Picnic Area Drawing (BLRI Archives PKY-BR-BL-5394)

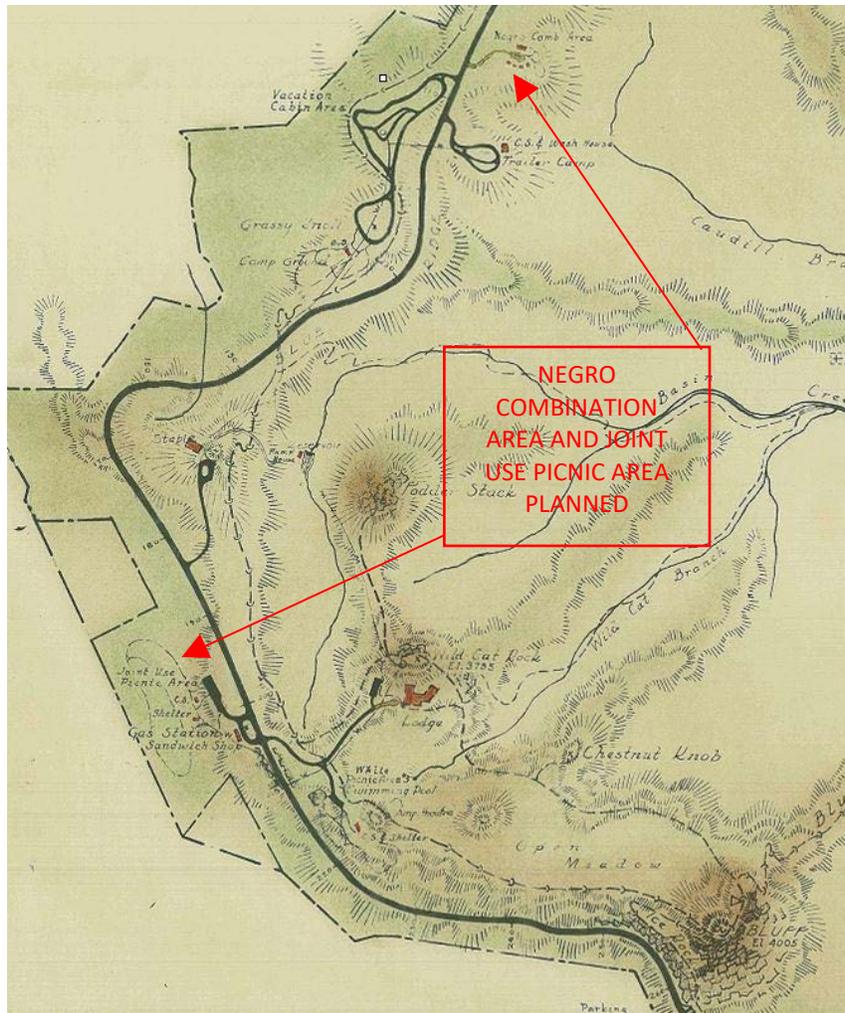


Figure 7: Master Plan Drawing of Bluff Park (NARA PKY-BR-BL-2003)

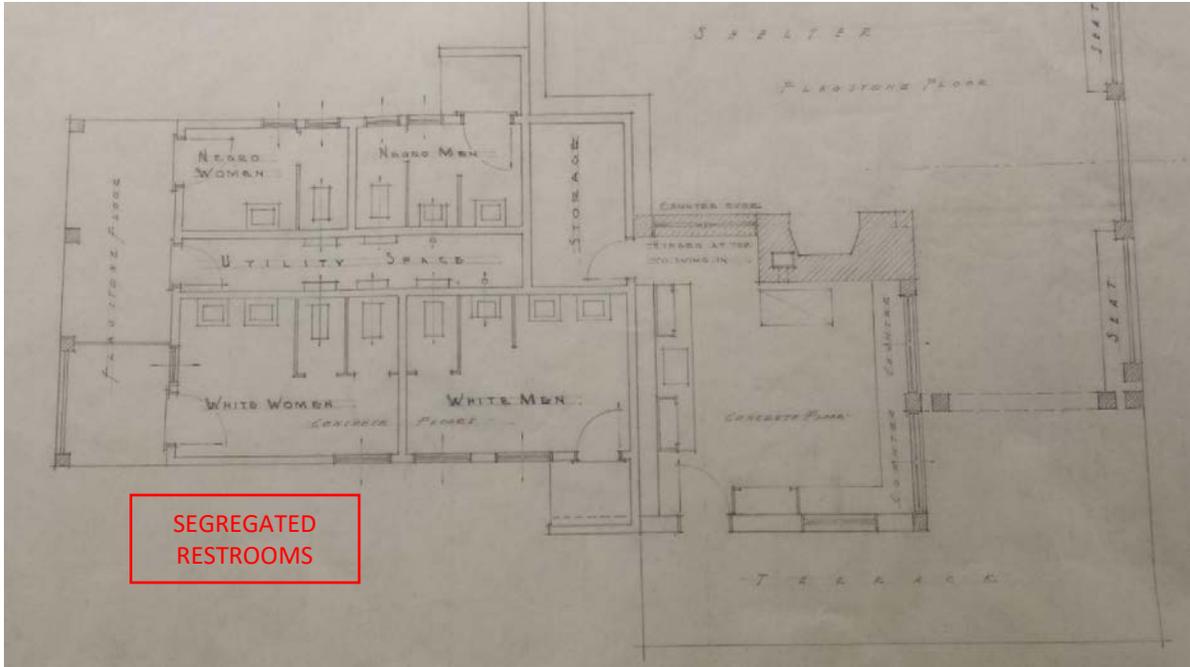


Figure 8: Drawing of Cumberland Knob Comfort Station (BLRI Archives – PWY-BR-CK-2015A)

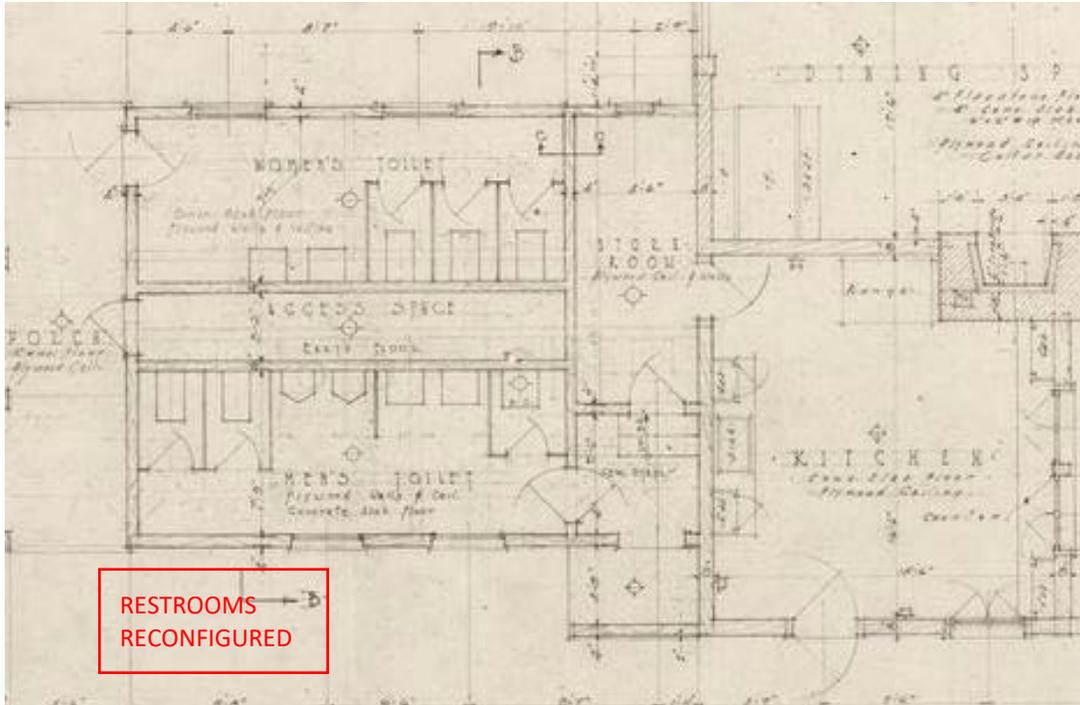


Figure 9: Drawing of Cumberland Knob Comfort Station (*Driving Through Time*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/blueridgeparkway/content/6212/>, accessed May 30, 2017)

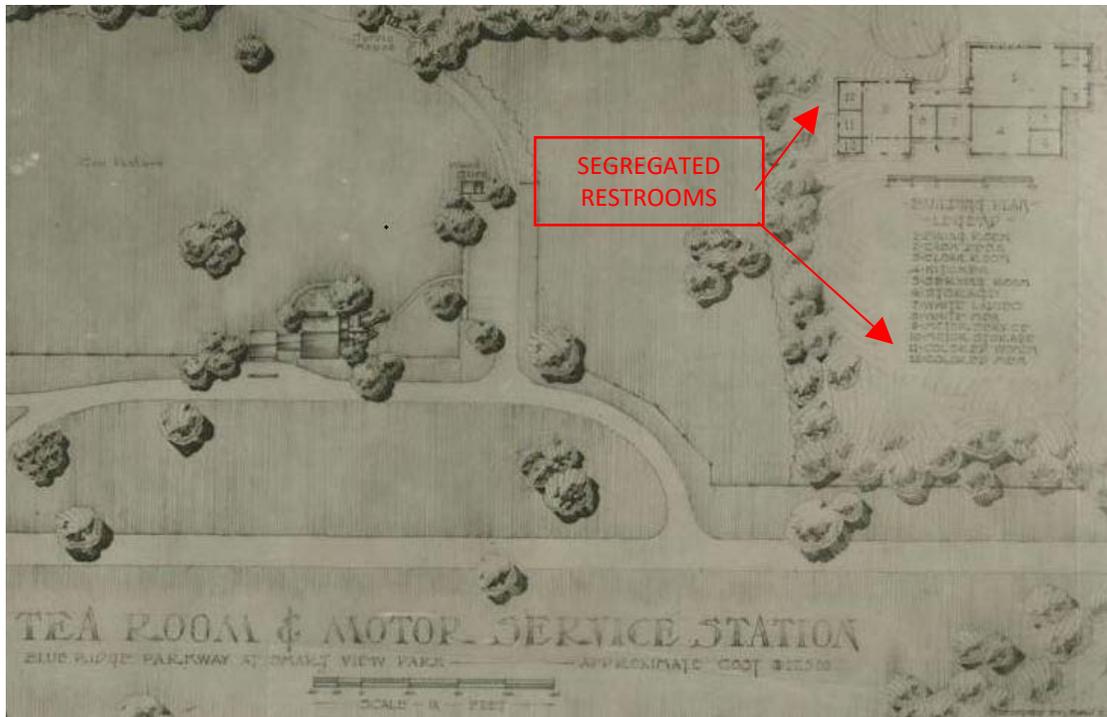


Figure 10: Drawing of Smart View Tea Room and Motor Service Station (*Driving Through Time*, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/blueridgeparkway/content/15626/>, accessed May 30, 2017)

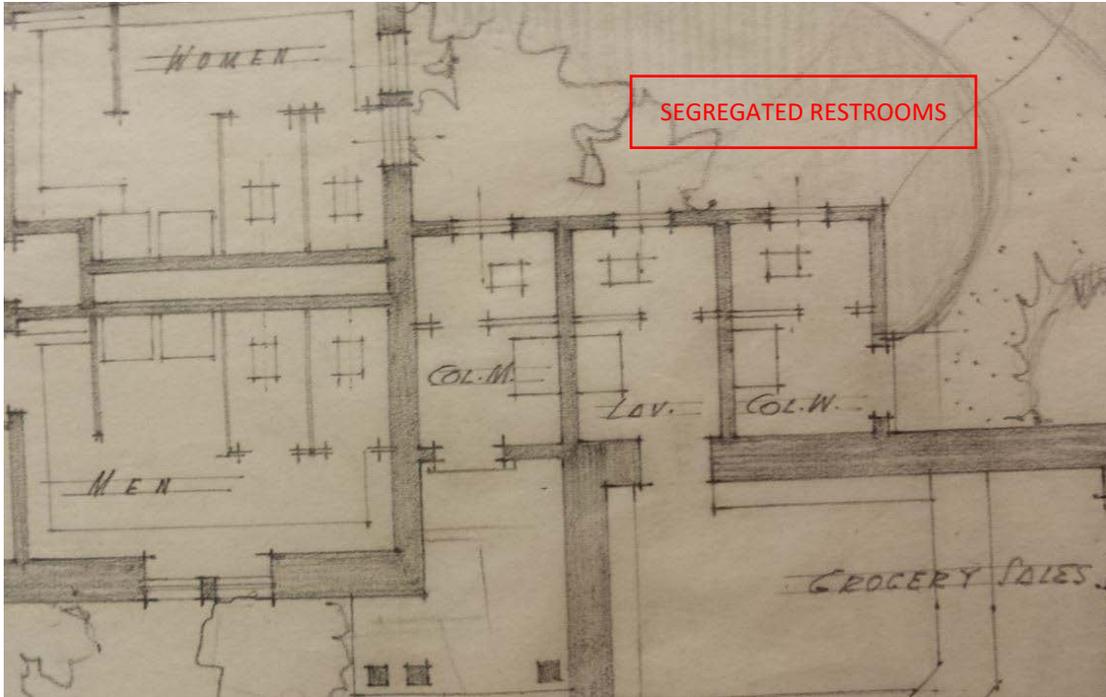


Figure 11: Drawing of Rocky Knob Coffee Shop and Gas Station 1938 (BLRI Archives - PKY-BR-RK-2020)

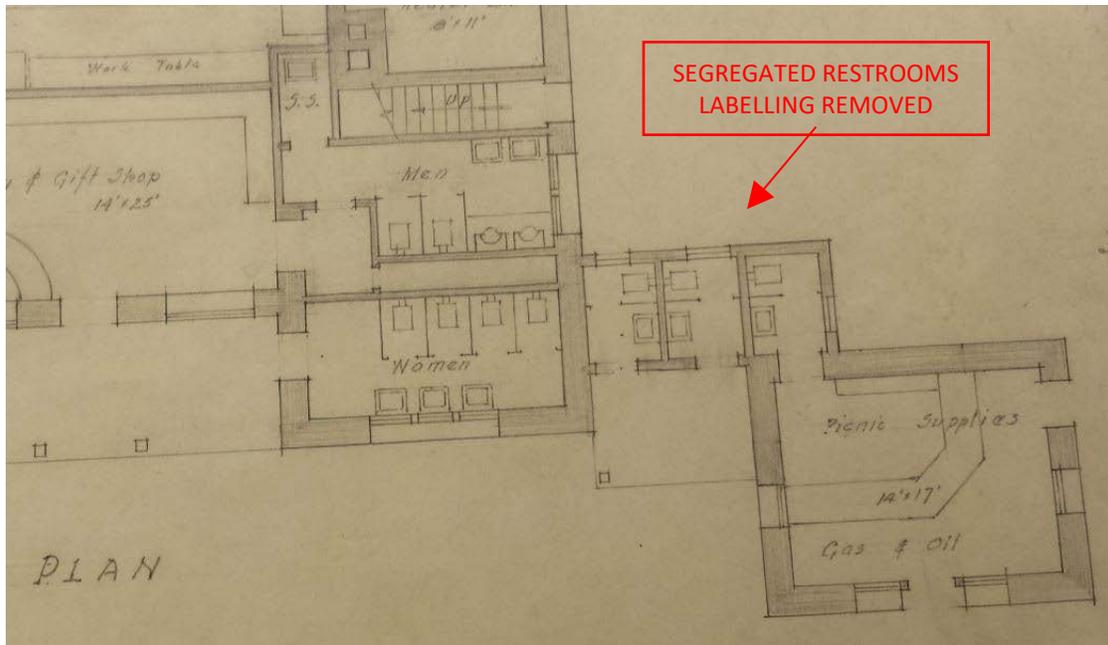


Figure 12: Drawing of Rocky Knob Coffee Shop and Gas Station 1946 (BLRI Archives - PKY-BR-RK-2020A)

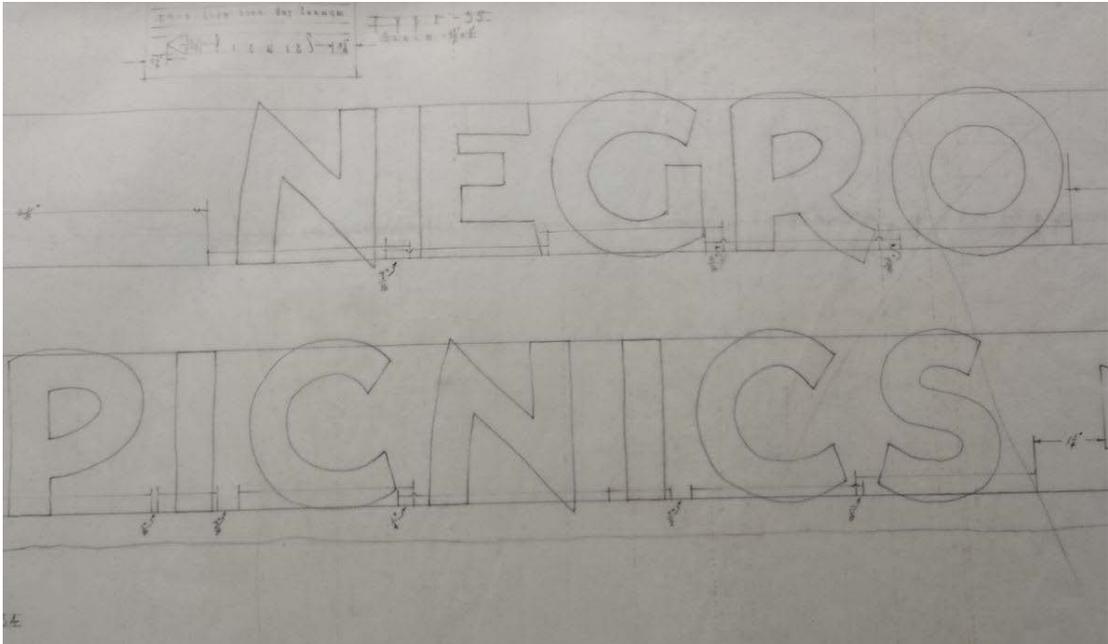


Figure 13: Drawing of Signage – Picnic Areas (BLRI Archives - PKY-BR-GEN-2016)



Figure 14: Drawing of Signage – Restrooms (BLRI Archives - PKY-BR-GEN-2016)

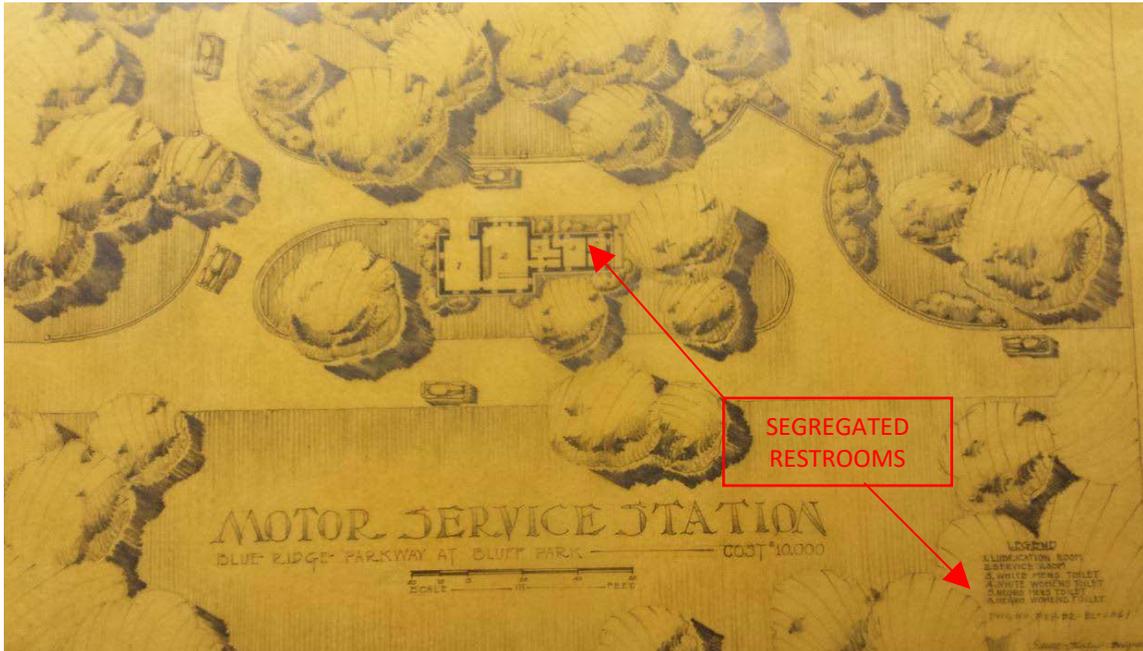


Figure 15: Drawing of Bluff Park Motor Service Station (BLRI Archives - PKY-BR-BL-2061)

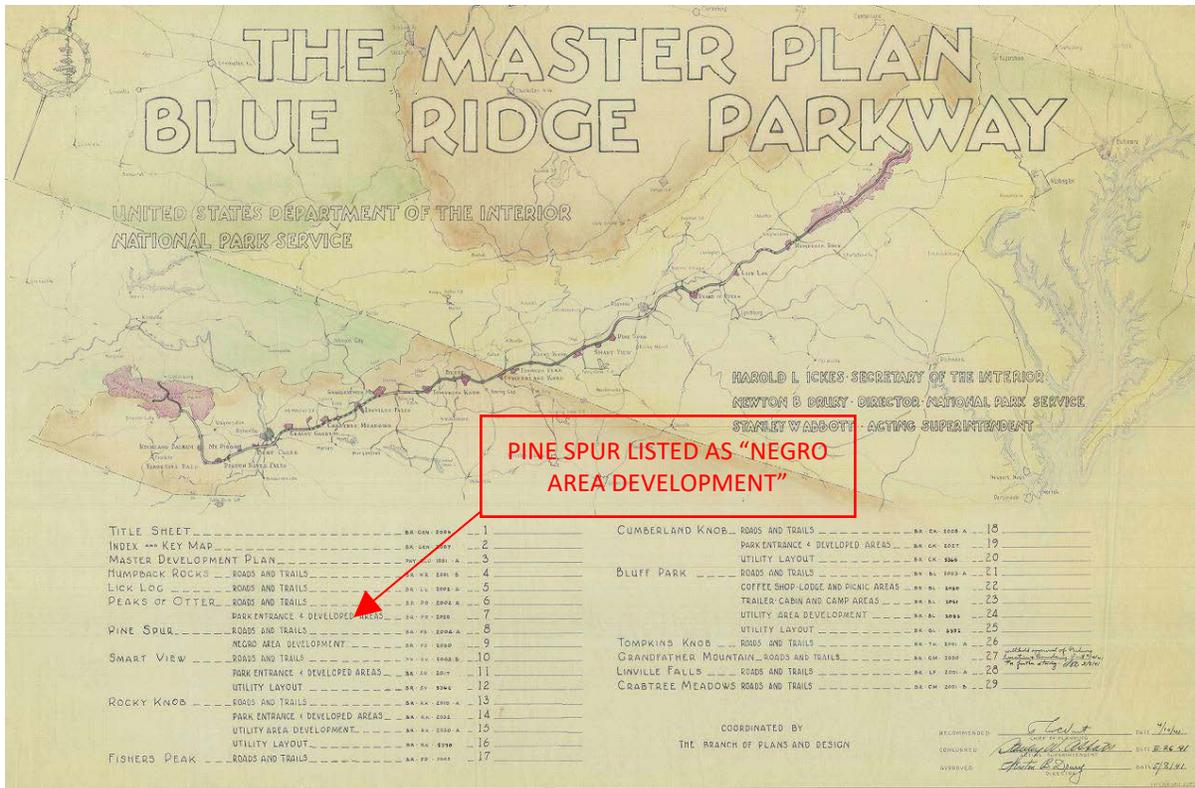


Figure 16: Title Sheet of Master Plan Drawings (NARA – 1941 Master Plans)

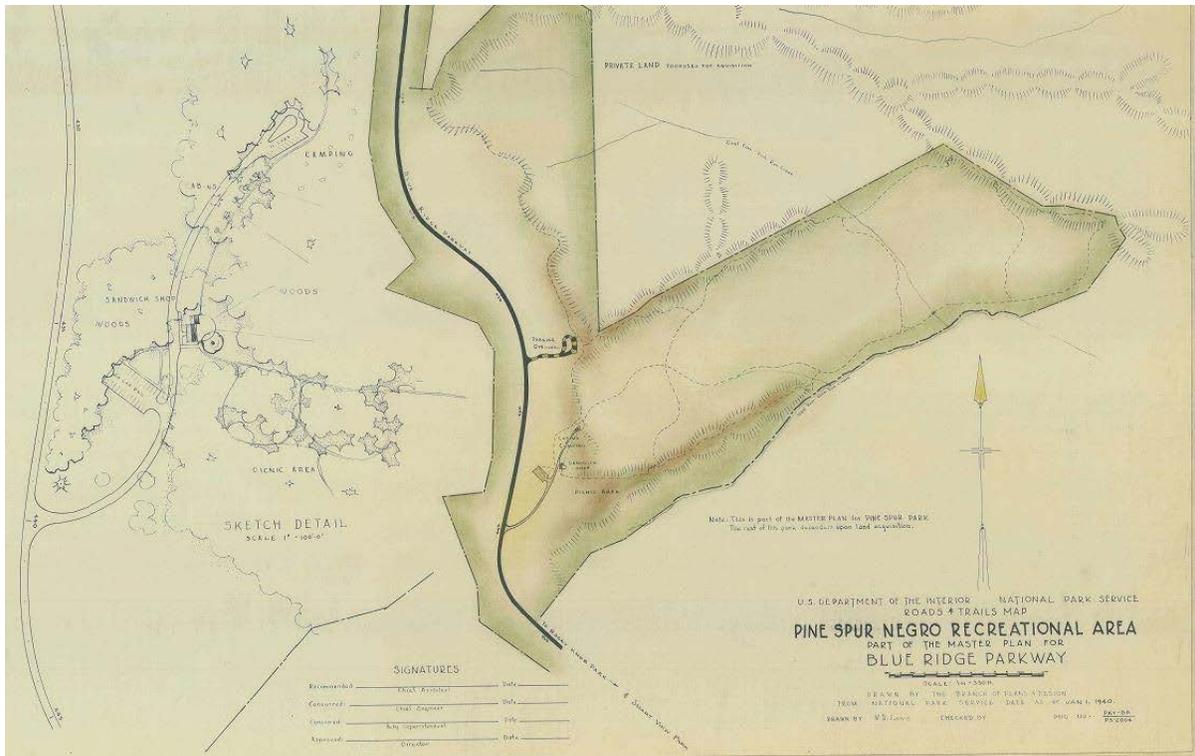


Figure 17: Master Plan Drawing of Pine Spur (NARA – 1941 Master Plans)

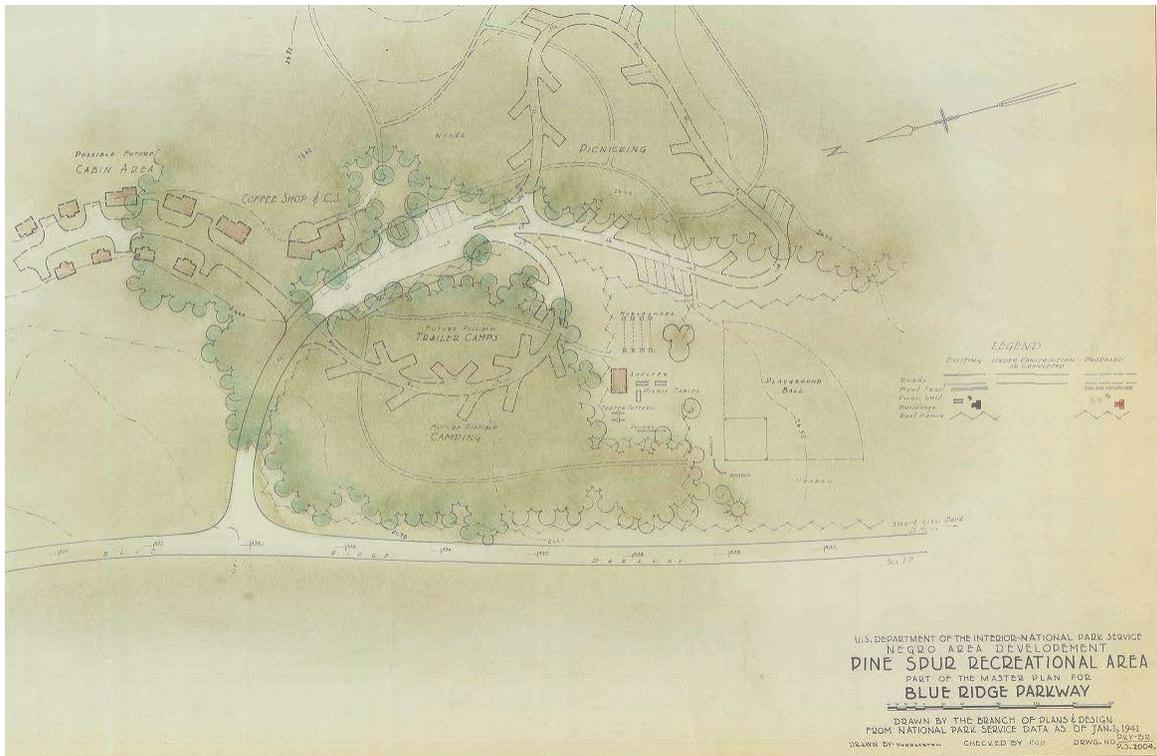


Figure 18: Master Plan Drawing of Pine Spur (NARA – 1941 Master Plans)

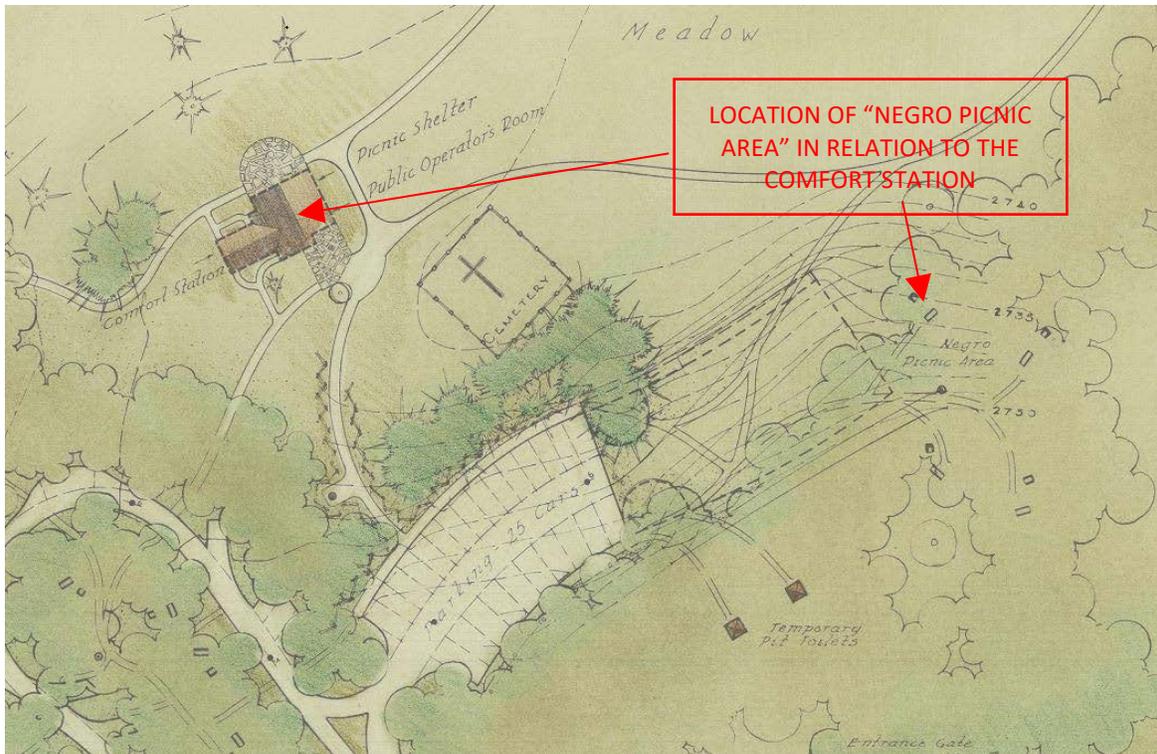


Figure 19: Master Plan Drawing of Cumberland Knob (NARA – PKY-BR-CK-2008A)

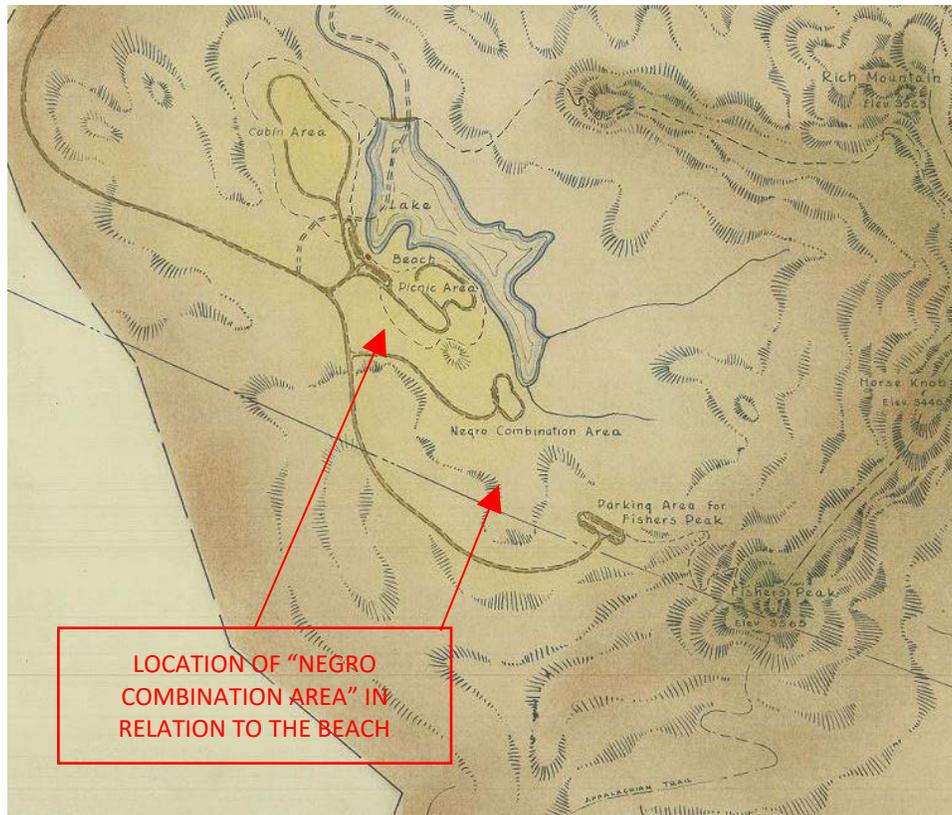
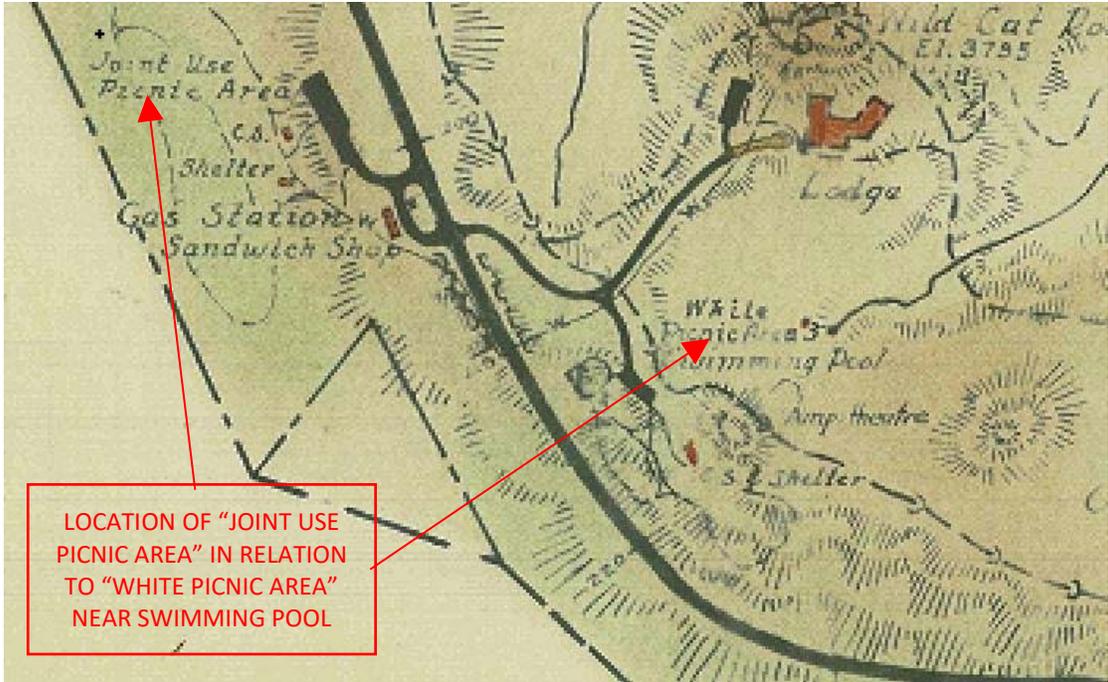


Figure 20: Master Plan Drawing of Fishers Peak (NARA – PKY-BR-FP-2002)



LOCATION OF "JOINT USE  
PICNIC AREA" IN RELATION  
TO "WHITE PICNIC AREA"  
NEAR SWIMMING POOL

Figure 21: Master Plan Drawing of Bluff Park (NARA – PKY-BR-BL-2003)



Figure 22: Promotional Drawing (BLRI ARCHIVES)



Figure 23: Photograph of Parkway Visitors (BLRI ARCHIVES-MP239)



Figure 24: Photograph of Parkway Visitors (BLRI ARCHIVES-MP241)

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