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UPPER MISSISSIPPI

Yellowstone Park, Wyoming
October 8, 1931

PROPOSED UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER NATIONAL PARK

The Director
National Park Service
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. Director:

ACT OF CONGRESS

H.R. 4020 was introduced by Mr. Haugen of Iowa, June 17, 1929, authorizing examination of the area proposed for the Mississippi Valley National Park. The Interior Department reported favorably upon this bill. The bill was passed by the House of Representatives on May 21, 1930, and by the Senate on June 11, and was signed by the President on June 16, 1930. This bill directed the National Park Service to make an official inspection of the Upper Mississippi area and to report to Congress on the desirability of the area as a national park.

INSPECTION

In accordance with your instructions I visited the proposed Upper Mississippi National Park area on the six days from May 19 to 24, 1931 inclusive.

Mr. Walter H. Beall, President of the Northeastern Iowa National Park Association, and others associated with him, have handled the proposal for a national park in an admirable way. Their motives are purely public spirited, and their chief object is to conserve the beauty of the river scenery. They asked the National Park Service to decide whether the area was suitable for a national park and indicated that they would cooperate with the wishes of the Service, whatever they might be. The inspection trip was carefully planned and well conducted. It included three or four days by auto, visiting all four of the states and most of the counties that were included in the area under consideration. The two-day trip, by boat, covering about 140 miles down the Mississippi River, offered views different from those obtained on the shore. Arrangements were made by which men who are especially qualified to furnish information on archaeology, history, geology, botany and other natural sciences, joined the party for a day or more, and they also furnished material that is submitted herewith, including publications relating to the area in question, and especially prepared reports, lists and other material not otherwise obtainable. Among those who furnished

very valuable cooperation were Mr. Eugene Adams of Dubuque; Mr. James H. Lees, of Des Moines, Assistant State Geologist; Dr. I. E. Melhus, head of the Department of Botany, Iowa State College at Ames; Dr. Charles R. Keyes of Cornell College, Iowa, State Archaeologist; Mrs. Henry Frankle of Des Moines, and Mrs. R. H. Volland, of Iowa City, both members of the State Board of Conservation; Dr. Bruce E. Mahan, of the University of Iowa, noted botanist and scientist; and others who are mentioned later in the itinerary of the trip.

Through the advance planning that was done by Mr. Beall, Mr. Adams, Captain Bell and others, it was possible to see the area more thoroughly, and under more favorable conditions than would otherwise have been possible.

The people whom we met in the four states showed an interest in the conservation of the scenery of the Upper Mississippi River Valley that inspires sympathetic and friendly consideration.

LOCATION

The area under consideration is the valley of the Mississippi River, from Bellevue, Iowa, to Lake Pepin, Minnesota, comprising about 220 miles of the Mississippi River, and is located in the states of Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. In width, the area under consideration includes the river, the islands and bottom lands, and wooded slopes and the bluffs on each side of the river, and a sufficient distance back from the edge of the bluffs to protect the scenic quality of the banks as seen from the river. The width varies from three or four miles to perhaps ten miles. Assuming an average width of five miles, the total area under consideration comprises approximately a thousand square miles.

The area specified in the Act of Congress is included in the following counties: Allamakee, Clayton, Dubuque, and Jackson counties, Iowa; Jo Daviess County, Illinois; Grant, Crawford, Vernon, La Crosse, Trempealeau, Buffalo, Pepin, and Pierce counties, Wisconsin; and Houston, Winona, Wabasha, and Goodhue counties, Minnesota.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF AREA

The Mississippi River is an important artery of commerce and is extensively used for freight. The present channel is six feet in depth at low water. The War Department is now working on a project to increase the depth of the channel to nine feet at low water, by the construction of numerous dams across the river, from St. Louis to St. Paul. Locks are to be provided to permit the passage of boats and barges. This project will require several years to complete and the total cost is expected to exceed a hundred million dollars.

The Mississippi Wild Life Refuge has been authorized by Congress, and the project is being carried out by the Biological Survey. The purchase of more than a hundred thousand acres of land is proposed. The lands to be purchased are bottom lands that are subject to flooding during high stages of the river. This project extends into Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. The act provides that this project shall not interfere with the project for deepening the river channel. Some of the lands that have been purchased will be submerged by the proposed dams across the river, but it is understood that, in general, lands to be purchased will be those that are subject to occasional flooding, but that will still be above the low-water level after the dams across the river have been completed. Parts of the area are to be used as game and fish refuges, but in most of the area hunting is and will be permitted during open season. The continuation and improvement of migratory bird hunting is one of the objectives of the project.

Both banks of the river are occupied by railroad tracks, the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad on the east bank and the Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad on the west bank.

There are several railroad and highway bridges across the Mississippi River, within the area under consideration, that are used for inter-state travel and commerce.

There are numerous villages, towns and cities, on both banks of the river, within the area under consideration. These include Dubuque in Iowa, Prairie du Chien and La Crosse in Wisconsin, Winona and Wabasha in Minnesota. It is estimated that the total population within the area under consideration is in excess of 100,000.

The hills and bluffs along the river rise to a height of about 500 feet above the river level. In general, the river banks are well forested. There are numerous perpendicular bluffs of limestone, picturesquely framed by tree-clad slopes. The actual river channel occupies only a portion of the valley floor, and on one or both sides of the channel are islands and bottomlands that are tree covered. Numerous secondary channels wind in and out among the islands, and lakes indicate the location of former channels. The river scenery is beautiful, whether seen from eminences on the bluffs or from the river itself. It is a type of beauty that is restful, verdant and charming.

The primary object of the Northeastern Iowa National Park Association is to preserve the attractive, wooded scenery of the Mississippi River, and that is an objective with which anyone will heartily agree.

It seems, however, that the problem is one that can and should be solved by the states directly interested, rather than by the federal government.

There are many points in common between the Mississippi River and the Hudson River. Both are large, navigable rivers, with beautiful scenery along their banks, both have railroad tracks paralleling the river, and a considerable population along the banks. Both are available to the recreational use of a densely populated section of the country. The Palisades Interstate Park in New York and New Jersey has accomplished remarkable results in protecting and conserving the scenery of the Hudson and in offering wholesome and healthful recreation to the people of New York and vicinity. It seems that the problems of the Mississippi River can be solved in a similar way, making a small start either with donations or legislative appropriations, or both, and expanding as rapidly as public opinion becomes convinced that the project is feasible and desirable.

ACCESSIBILITY

The area is readily accessible by railroad and by automobile.

The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad and the Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad both have tracks and operate passenger service along the banks of the Mississippi River through the area under consideration.

A network of motor roads make points on both banks of the river readily accessible to motorists, and several highway bridges spanning the Mississippi, within the area under consideration, carry traffic across the river from one state to another.

The river is accessible by boat, upon special arrangement, but no regular passenger service is maintained by boat on this portion of the river.

LAND OWNERSHIP AND VALUES

The Government now owns some lands within the area, including an island near Bellevue which has been used as a proving ground and military depot. As the work of deepening the river channel progresses the War Department will doubtless acquire title, by purchase or condemnation, of the lands to be flooded by the dams. As stated above, the Biological Survey is now acquiring more than 100,000 acres of bottom lands. The Bellevue State Park of Iowa, the Nelson Dewey State Park and the Parrot State Park of Wisconsin are within the area, and there are probably a few other tracts in municipal, state and federal ownership.

There is no unappropriated and unreserved public domain within the area, and the land is all in private ownership except for tracts that are held in public ownership for specific purposes.

The value of the bluff lands is said to run from \$10.00 to \$20.00 an acre, depending somewhat upon the stand of timber on the land. Improve-

ments and buildings are not included in this figure. Some of the bluff lands have little value and in some cases taxes have not been kept up on them. The Biological Survey was authorized to purchase lands that are subject to flooding, so that all of the lands they have purchased are river-bottom lands. The original act limited them to a price of \$5.00 per acre, but this has since been increased to an average price of \$10.00 per acre.

The proposed Upper Mississippi Valley National Park would comprise an area of about 200 miles long by five miles or more in width. This would represent a total area of about 1,000 square miles. The river channel would be in use for commercial purposes and would be maintained by the War Department. Part of the flooded lands would be purchased by the Biological Survey and administered as a migratory bird refuge. Cities and towns would have to be excluded from any park area. Therefore at best the park would be made up of a number of isolated tracts, comprising principally bluff lands from the railroad right of way to a line back of the edge of the bluffs. If 500 square miles were desired for the area of the park this would represent 325,000 acres. The cost of purchase of this area would probably be not less than three million dollars and perhaps more than twice that amount.

CONCLUSIONS

It does not seem desirable to establish a national park along the Upper Mississippi River Valley.

The scenery is typical rather than extraordinary. It represents the beauty of a large river, flowing through charmingly wooded country, with moderately elevated banks. It does not have any unique, remarkable or superlative characteristic such as would make it an outstanding scenic feature of national interest.

The fact that the banks of the river are in private ownership, and that there are many established rights and interests due to the commercial use of the river, the prospective flooding of the river bed and the deepening of the channel, the wild life project, the railroad trackage, the towns and cities in the area, all present complications which would affect the administration of the area as a national park.

Along the banks of the Mississippi River there are prehistoric mounds built by Indians and used as burial places. Many hundreds of these mounds have been obliterated by farming operations. It seems desirable that some representative examples be preserved, since they are of great archaeological interest to the present and future generations. It is my understanding that no better mounds are found in Iowa than those that are near

McGregor. There are three types of mound: The conical, the lineal and the effigy. All are represented here. In Wisconsin there are similar mounds, some of which are a feature of interest in the Nelson Dewey State Park. The effigy mounds are perhaps three to six feet in maximum height and approximately a hundred feet in length. They represent the outline of a bird, or an animal, such as a bear. The mounds are covered with sod and in some cases with brush and even large trees. Little is known as to the history of the mounds or their use and significance. Their age is believed that of the Columbian Era. Burials are found in all of the mounds that have been excavated, although there were but few burials in some of the large mounds; while there were many burials in other mounds. Some are original burials, where the body is found in place, while others are secondary burials and include only the skull and larger bones which have been transferred, after burial in some other place. The burials are sometimes accompanied by arrowheads, implements, pottery and other artifacts.

I would recommend that a national monument be authorized, whenever suitable land is available for presentation to the United States, for the purpose of protecting and preserving for future generations the best examples of prehistoric Indian mounds that are to be found in this region. Well preserved mounds in Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois or Minnesota would be eligible to be included in the national monument. The monument would be located in one or more states according to the interest shown, and the acquisition of suitable mounds. The monument might be in several detached areas. Liberal sized tracts would be desirable, including enough of the adjacent land to prevent the encroachment of other uses. It was urged by a member of the Iowa State Board of Conservation that the minimum area in one state should be set at about 5,000 acres.

If the plan for a national monument herein suggested is carried into effect, and is proven to serve a useful purpose and to meet with popular favor, there is no reason why additions to this national monument cannot be made from time to time, as funds for the purchase of additional land become available. It would seem that such a national monument would serve most of the objectives that are sought to be served by means of a national park. It would offer not only the preservation of the prehistoric Indian mounds, but also would aid in the conservation of the river scenery, would add to the opportunities for education and recreation of the densely populated regions tributary to the Upper Mississippi River Valley, and would help to preserve and stimulate the historic interest of the region. The size and importance of such a national monument can be increased in the future, in proportion to the public interest that is awakened in the project.

On Pikes Hill, on the Iowa side of the river, directly across from the mouth of the Wisconsin River, Lieutenant Pike, in 1806, advocated the

construction of a fort. There are some Indian mounds on the summit of the hill. The land was owned by the Munn estate and recently, after some difficulty, the land was presented to the United States and is being administered by the Biological Survey in connection with the near-by flood lands that they have acquired. Pikes Hill, or Pikes Peak as it is also called, is one of the highest points along the Mississippi River and presents an excellent view. The scenery is as fine as any on that portion of the Mississippi River that is under consideration. It would be a desirable part of the proposed national monument, if the Biological Survey is agreeable to the transfer.

None of the present national parks nor monuments under the control of the Interior Department contain any Indian mounds of this type, and it would seem that the inclusion of an Indian Mound National Monument would add to the completeness of the prehistoric remains that are protected as national monuments. Mound City Group, in Ohio, is a national monument administered by the War Department. Its area is only 57 acres. It contains a famous group of prehistoric mounds in Camp Sherman Military Reservation.

There are large mounds in the Cahokia Mound State Park of Illinois, including the Monks Mound which is approximately a hundred feet in height. This state park, which comprises 144 acres, is only a few miles from St. Louis. This group of mounds are remarkable for their size.

The effigy mounds of the Upper Mississippi River Valley are unique, occur only in a limited area, and are stated to be the most interesting in the United States.

It is believed that a national park in the valley of the Upper Mississippi River is not desirable, but that a national monument, comprising some of the best of the Indian mounds, would be desirable.

Respectfully submitted

Roger W. Toll
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