

## MAINTENANCE OF THE PRIMEVAL IN NATIONAL PARKS

By  
Arno B. Cammerer  
Director, National Park Service

The term "park" has been applied so long to a man-made area planted to vegetation that it is sometimes difficult for our European friends to conceive of a national park as a primeval, unspoiled area. Nearly every foreigner who visits American national parks is led to comment on the fact that these areas are quite different from the artificially landscaped parks with which they are familiar; -- our national parks are wilderness preserves where true natural conditions are to be found.

When Americans in years to come wish to seek out extensive virgin forests, mountain solitudes, deep canyons, or sparsely vegetated deserts, they will be able to find them in the national parks. While other areas are fashioned to meet the economic needs of the people, the national parks will continue to emphasize the inspirational values inherent in unspoiled natural conditions.

The first practical move in the United States looking toward the preservation of primeval areas came when Congress established Yellowstone National Park in 1872. The following clause was included in the Act relative to the care and management of that area: "Such regulations shall provide for the preservation from injury or spoliation of all timber, mineral deposits, natural curiosities or wonders within said park and their retention in their natural condition." When Yosemite and Sequoia were added to the national

park system, the same clause was incorporated.

Following the lead of earlier champions of wilderness conditions, Stephen T. Mather and a large group of conservationists realized that for certain areas there must be a type of conservation other than that which was being followed in forest preservation. They appreciated the fact that preservation of forests and forest areas for commercial use was highly important. But, they knew there must be some form of conservation which would set aside the superlative natural resources of the country for the higher uses of inspiration, science, history, and recreation and yet would conserve them for all time. As a result of their efforts Congress in 1916, established the National Park Service "... to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them (the parks) unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." It can be seen, therefore, that in the national parks the preservation of wilderness conditions is more than a mere regulation; it is basic law. This original fundamental policy has assumed increasing importance with the passing of the years as many natural scenic resources have disappeared outside the parks. This ideal carried into effect by the park administrators has received the approbation of park visitors and of conservation organizations.

In the first definition of policies issued to the new Service by the Secretary of the Interior in 1918, it was further emphasized that: "The national parks must be maintained in absolutely unimpaired form

for the use of future generations as well as those of our own time." A later statement of policy by the Secretary in 1925 specified that the national parks "... must be maintained untouched by inroads of modern civilization in order that unspoiled bits of native America may be preserved to be enjoyed by future generations as well as our own."

Before undertaking further discussion of the place and maintenance of the primeval, some definitions are in order, for there has been considerable confusion in the use of the terms "wilderness" and "primeval."

A committee of the National Resources Committee, in attempting to systematize usage of these terms, first divides all recreational areas into four classes -- primitive, modified, developed, and scientific. The primitive class embraces areas characterized by primitive conditions of transportation, vegetation, fauna, or any combination of these. Primitive areas may be roadless, containing no provision for the passage of motorized transportation (minimum size of forest roadless area, 100,000 acres; of desert roadless area, 500,000 acres); virgin, with virtually no disturbance of the natural vegetative balance (not less than 5,000 acres); wildlife, providing protection for all wildlife species; wilderness, combining the requirements for both a roadless and a virgin area; sanctuary, combining the requirements of a virgin and wildlife area; and primeval, combining the requirements of the roadless, the virgin, and the wildlife areas.

Consequently, the term "primeval" will in the following

discussion be applicable to areas within the parks that are roadless, virgin, and with wildlife protected. It will be noted that this includes nearly every portion of a national park that lacks roads.

The administrative policies of the National Park Service have been based on the idea of complete sanctuary, complete protection for all forms of life, both animal and plant. Hence, incorporated in the wildlife policy is the statement that "every species shall be left to carry on its struggle for existence unaided." Predatory animals are to be considered an integral part of the wildlife protected within national parks, and no widespread campaigns of destruction are to be countenanced. The forest policy of the National Park Service conforms to similar objectives: "To maintain the forests of the national parks and monuments in their natural state as far as that is possible and consistent with their use and safety; to maintain the forest ecological balance."

Opportunities for preserving the primeval are greatest on large Government reservations where no commercial or industrial pressure influences the manner of use. Fortunately, within the national park system actual natural conditions can be maintained because of the prohibition of grazing, hunting, tree cutting and like enterprises that are usually destructive.

Whenever we plan the conservation of animal life, we are confronted with three factors of environment which are essential to the existence of each and every species: (1) presence of safe breeding places, (2) presence of places of temporary refuge for individuals hard pressed by their enemies, (3) presence of an adequate food supply. All of these

three factors must be present to assure safety of a species.

In undisturbed natural conditions we find these factors in greatest measure, and in the preservation of primeval conditions are found the best opportunities to conserve a full complement of living forms. Cutting of timber, grazing, heavy human use, all affect these environmental necessities for living animals. Consequently, enjoined by law to conserve wildlife within a park, the best way of doing it is to leave its habitat unmodified. The abundance of wildlife within the national parks testifies to the success of this important policy of providing proper environment.

In the protection of primeval areas, there is recognized the scientific importance of holding intact some of the best places for studying the distribution, variation, and relations to environment of the various forms of life.

From studies of the living world have come most of the advances in culture and the filling of economic needs. The Ecological Society of America, sensing the importance of primeval areas as places for study, has advocated consistently the setting aside of nature reserves to be left without management. Such reservations become of greater importance as we see the increasing despoliation of our natural environment by man, and the increasing need for ecological information on the principles underlying life and its relationships to other forms of life.

A proper balance between conservation and use without destruction is being worked out. Obviously, limited areas must be utilized to house and accommodate the park visitors, and provide necessary

access.

It is only natural that a representative section of each park must be opened to the public by motor roads. The policy of the National Park Service has been and will continue to be to restrict roads to those essential for necessary access and for exhibiting outstanding features and then only when roads will be consistent with the type of feature to be shown. Certainly, no wilderness lover could selfishly demand that the national parks be kept only for those who are physically able to travel them on foot or on horseback, for they were definitely set aside for the benefit and enjoyment of all. In reality, within the national parks the road mileage is very low in comparison with the total area involved.

The areas for concentrated use are small in comparison to the extensive unmodified portions. Traversed only by people on foot or on horseback, travel into these portions is not so great, but it is recognized that this use is just as important to the people visiting the parks as is the use of the concentrated camping areas. These undeveloped areas are the portions that act as buffer zones to those isolated inaccessible tracts which are seldom visited by any human.

There are within every major national park primeval areas into which people are not expected to come unless they enter just as our forefathers entered the primeval wildernesses of the past, that is, without the accompaniments of conveniences of travel or subsistence. These primeval areas are fundamentally established and protected as areas in which neither the topography, the flora, nor the fauna have been disturbed or will be disturbed in any way by man. Large primeval

areas of this type seldom invaded even by hikers are found in Yellowstone, Mt. McKinley, Glacier, Yosemite, and Sequoia National Parks, and less extensive ones in the other parks. Estimates of how greatly national parks are modified are not to be obtained by traveling over roads through developed areas but only by inspection of the roadless areas of the parks which are true wildernesses.

The proposed Everglades National Park in Florida has the following clause written into the Enabling Act: "The said area or areas shall be permanently preserved as a wilderness, and no development of the project or plan for the entertainment of visitors shall be undertaken which will interfere with the preservation intact of the unique flora and fauna and the essential primitive natural conditions now prevailing in this area." In another proposed park, Isle Royale in Lake Superior, development plans have purposely omitted roads. Trails will be few in number and simple in kind as this park will lack even horse transportation purposely to give emphasis to its value as a pure unspoiled primeval park.

Many members of the Appalachian Mountain Club are familiar with the proposals to establish the Mount Katahdin area in the State of Maine as a national park. Should that eventuate, the National Park Service would apply to the area its policies herein outlined, with special emphasis on preserving the primeval. Parts of the Katahdin region have been cut-over, grazed, over-developed, and unnecessary roads have been constructed. The Service would attempt to reduce those intrusions to a minimum, and with the right kind of protection allow them to regain their natural features. The objective of the

Service is to perpetuate the essential wilderness character of Mount Katahdin. The restoration of wilderness features which have been dissipated by ill-advised and unfortunate developments will greatly improve the terrain and emphasize the primeval character of the area. Those who are concerned over saving the wilderness condition of the Katahdin area will appreciate such objectives.

The proposed Kings Canyon National Park in California is a typical area where a minimum of development should be provided. The Secretary of the Interior on September 20, 1935, in order to make it clear how the Department planned to keep the wilderness values intact, issued the following policy statement:

"1. This park will be treated as a primitive wilderness. Foot and horse trails to provide reasonable access will be encouraged, but roads must be held to the absolute minimum. The state road now being constructed should never be extended beyond the floor of Kings River Canyon."

"2. Responsible packers will be encouraged to conduct their parties through the park, the only restriction being their conformance to such rules and regulations as will be promulgated in the interest of the public and the preservation of the primitive character of the area."

Likewise, the plans for the newly created Olympic National Park in the State of Washington omit any hotel or lodge developments in the central portion of that park. Roads will be limited to existing ones and those necessary for access to the boundary. Simple shelters for hiking and horseback parties will be provided along trails which will constitute the only means of access to the heart of the park.

The great advantage to be gained by placing areas under maintenance as national parks is that the basic laws of Congress prevent



economic and commercial use of their natural features. Only by Act of Congress can parks be established, and only by the same token can they be abolished or modified. Public endorsement of park objectives, therefore, has created the national parks of today.

Because of specified duties which bring protection to all features, the national parks are in a most favored position to provide truly primeval areas suitable for the highest scientific and educational use and such recreational use as may be consistent thereto.

We all need the tonic of the great inspirational park areas to clear up the cobwebs and rust of civilization. The best guarantee that that tonic will remain available to future generations is to be found in a sound Governmental policy of acquiring primeval areas before they are despoiled and maintaining them with the least disturbance possible including freedom from man-made sights and sounds. Basic law, a definite policy, and actual practice makes it possible for the National Park Service to maintain large primeval areas in the national parks. Though the average visitor seldom gets very far from the few developed centers, he may find close at hand the solitude and quietude of a large primeval area. And his only means of appreciating its extent is dependent upon utilizing primitive sustenance and means of travel.

For those who seek a primeval environment, just try the national parks! For those who seek a maximum of protection for a primeval area of national importance, let them investigate the administration afforded such areas by the National Park Service, the Government bureau designated to "retain areas in their natural condition."