

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

October 25, 1961

Memorandum

To: Secretary of the Interior

From: Director, National Park Service

Subject: Wildlife Conservation and Management

Among the resolutions passed by your Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings and Monuments at its 45th Meeting at Olympic National Park, September 15-19, 1961, was one titled Wildlife Conservation and Management in the National Parks and Monuments. This resolution endorsed a statement of objectives and policy relating to Wildlife Conservation and Management in the National Parks and Monuments, approved by me on September 14, 1961.

The reproduced statement follows this memorandum. We have prepared it in an effort to clarify a situation that has been of concern to many people and organizations throughout the Country. You will note that it makes no change in the policy which has governed wildlife management in parks for more than half a century, a policy that has set the standards for national parks and nature reserves throughout the world. Because the Congress has made exceptions in the past and will determine policies for new areas in the National Park System, the statement applies only to areas for which there are no legislative exceptions to these basic concepts of wildlife management.

As a result of the release of the Advisory Board's resolutions under Departmental press release of October 9, we have had requests for copies of our September 14 statement. So that it will be clearly understood, we will send a copy of this memorandum with the September 14 statement which follows.


Director

Wildlife Conservation and Management

in the

National Parks and Monuments

This paper presents the position of the National Park Service on the conservation and management of the natural environments represented in the National Parks and the National Monuments, and particularly in

regard to the regulation of wildlife populations. The National Recreational Areas, and certain other areas where hunting is permitted under special laws, are not included in this discussion.

Serious questions have arisen within the Service and among the public concerning the necessity for and the proper methods to use in bringing animal populations into closer harmony with their environments. The problem and the factors involved were set forth in some detail in a letter from the Director to the National Parks Association, dated February 20, 1961. This letter, in order to encourage the exploration of this question in full depth, focused special attention upon the possibility, which has been suggested to the Service, of public participation in animal control as a management measure. Copies of the letter were distributed widely among scientists, conservationists, fish and game administrators, and to other persons familiar with National Park conditions, policies, and practices. Their advice and counsel were requested and very generously and considerately given. The numerous replies have been most helpful and are greatly appreciated.

The regulation of wildlife populations in National Parks involves many factors which can be classified in three broad categories: Administrative, biological, and philosophical. We shall discuss these in order.

Administrative Responsibility.

The basic responsibility for the conservation, welfare, and management of the wildlife within the parks has been placed clearly upon the Department and the Service. In meeting this responsibility, the Service must work closely with the various State and Federal agencies concerned with wildlife conservation, and particularly with those that administer lands adjacent to the National Parks and Monuments. In many situations the animals migrate across park boundaries so that surpluses in relation to available range are joint problems that require coordinated control programs. Cooperation with other Federal and State agencies is a practical necessity, but divided conservation responsibilities, such as assignment of wildlife management jurisdictions within National Parks and Monuments to the corresponding State agencies, is likely to create more problems than it would solve. The Service is determined to do its part to strengthen its working arrangements with these agencies, but it cannot abrogate its responsibility for the wildlife within the parks, nor avoid accountability for the consequences of its management of this park resource. The Secretary of the Interior, through the Director of the National Park Service, will continue to be responsible for the conservation and management of the wildlife within the boundaries of the National Parks and Monuments.

Biological-Environmental Factors.

Certain biological-environmental factors entering into this problem are recognized by the Service and by others familiar with the situation. The important ones are:

Few if any of the National Parks and Monuments include a complete habitat for wide-ranging or migratory animals--ungulates or predators.

Important species of the predator group have been eliminated from most National Park areas, and there is little opportunity for their restoration in numbers which would restore effective natural controls.

In the absence of adequate natural controls and through lack of sufficiently vigorous management controls, ungulate populations in some parks have increased to a point where the environments have been damaged or are critically threatened. Prompt reductions of such populations are an obvious necessity. The urgency of the situation is such that outright removal or destruction of the surplus is indicated. However, a conclusion as to how this should be accomplished should not be drawn without a review of the philosophical background of basic park conservation objectives.

Philosophical Considerations.

The management objectives in the National Parks and Monuments are not aimed at the production of harvestable crops of game, forage, or timber. This relatively small sample of native America is dedicated to preserving and presenting the unfolding story of the land itself and the creatures that live on it. Man derives a special benefit from this. He is a spectator who comes to enjoy, to measure scientifically, to study, and through increasing comprehension to be refreshed and inspired.

It is not enough merely to protect the living resources of the National Parks and Monuments from the obvious dangers. Even the largest of these areas are not free from the influences of man which operate against the welfare of the native animals and the plants on which they must depend. Clearly there is need to correct or contain these adverse influences. The Service's obligation is to conduct its management work thoroughly but unobtrusively so as to permit the unfolding of ecological processes in a natural manner without allowing manmade pressures and influences to distort them.

The National Parks and Monuments are selected sanctuaries, representing less than one percent of the total area of the United States. They have a special purpose. Serving this purpose complements the conservation programs in the vastly larger part of the Country which is devoted to recreational hunting and the necessary production of renewable resources for consumptive use. The scientific and aesthetic values of this special purpose are immeasurable, but they are nonetheless real. This concept of National Parks and National Monuments as sanctuaries has been borne out through the long history of legislation creating these areas.

In specific reference to public hunting, the following questions suggest the important practical and philosophical considerations:

1. What effects would this additional impact have on the total ecological values and on the other physical resources of the parks?

2. Would hunting influence the behavior of the animals to the detriment of opportunities to see and photograph wildlife in the parks?
3. Could hunting be carried out safely without interfering seriously with the aesthetic enjoyment of the parks by the substantially greater number of not-hunting visitors?
4. Would public hunting, even under strict control, be sufficiently selective with respect to sex, age class, condition, and location of the animals killed by the hunters?
5. Would public hunting jeopardize non-game and endangered species?
6. Would public hunting destroy the sanctuary concept which has so importantly influenced the establishment of the National Parks and Monuments?
7. Would hunting reduce the values of special scientific study opportunities to be found only on un hunted environments in their entirety.

An objective consideration of these questions leads to the conclusion that public hunting is neither the appropriate nor the practical way to accomplish National Park and National Monument management objectives. Recreational hunting, however well justified and appropriate in other places, is irreconcilable to National Park and National Monument purposes.

Conclusions.

The present position of the Service does not depart from the established policy governing wildlife and the maintenance of entire natural environments and their ecological integrity in the National Parks and Monuments. The ultimate objective is to move ever closer to a self-sustaining relationship among all elements of the environment, using natural biological controls to maintain natural wildlife population balances. If, because of the effects of human activities within the parks or their environs this is not possible, the second method, in order of acceptability, is the imposition of artificial biological controls in order to restore or approximate natural ecological relationships. Competent and adequate ecological research is a prerequisite to the authorization of any artificial biological controls.

Neither of the above is believed adequate to meet the emergency situation that now prevails in some parks. Direct and immediate removal of the surplus is necessary. Transplanting of live animals to other ranges is rarely feasible--there are very few places where this can be done on the scale required because unoccupied range of a suitable nature is generally not available.

It is apparent that direct reduction is required to meet the immediate situation. The Service is confident that with adequate funds (actually


only a modest increase in wildlife management funds is required), with the understanding and support of the many people who have expressed their interest in this problem, and with new vigor and determination on its own part, this situation can be brought under control rapidly, and with a minimum of disturbance, without recourse to public participation. If, in extreme cases, it becomes necessary to seek additional help, the Service can employ temporary personnel or otherwise enlist the services of selected persons to work with and under the direction of park rangers in achieving the desired reduction. Distribution of the kill to various institutions, but chiefly to Indian tribes, can take care of practically all of the surplus so removed. Other appropriate means of disposal will be investigated and utilized as required.

The objective, then, is to bring populations to a level permitting restoration of the environment and to move toward maintenance of the balance through natural and artificial biological controls, using direct reduction as an emergency, interim measure.

In the long view, management of the natural environments must be based on complete and exact knowledge of all factors involved, and be guided by a program of continuous appraisal of wildlife and other natural conditions. This means adequate and continuous research and observations so as to adjust management practices to take fullest advantage of natural forces, and to recognize alien and adverse developments in the ecological conditions in time to take preventative actions before critical stages are reached. The Service will vigorously seek to strengthen its own research effort, and will encourage research by others toward this end.

This position shall apply to all National Parks and Monuments. A consistent policy must prevail among all.

Approved: September 14, 1961


Director

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