

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL MONUMENT
TWENTYNINE PALMS, CALIF.

July 3, 1946

MEMORANDUM for the Director.

CUSTODIAN'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL MONUMENT

Introduction

With the ending of hostilities, there has been an upswing in travel to Park Service areas and Joshua Tree has had a correspondingly larger visitation than during the war years. Our appropriation, being small, barely gave us enough funds to maintain the roads in fairly good condition and did not provide for any other improvements for the enjoyment of the general public.

Weather Conditions

The most noteworthy facts about the weather during the past year were the many cloudbursts starting July 31 and continuing throughout August which caused weekly damage to our roads in the monument. The rain continued into December with a total of 5.87 inches registered at Headquarters in Twentynine Palms from July 1 to December 31. Since January 1, there has been only .02 inches of rain, which saved our roads from washing but made maintenance difficult due to lack of moisture in the soil, and raised the fire hazard

Maximum temperature for the year, 111 on July 25
Minimum temperature for the year, 20.5 on January 31
Average maximum for the year, 83.6
Average minimum for the year, 52.4
Total rainfall at Twentynine Palms, 5.89 inches
270 clear days, 69 partly cloudy and 26 cloudy

Boundary Changes

The introduction of H.R. 4703 by Congressman Harry R. Sheppard brought the boundary question to the front this past year. The proposed deletion of 310,000 acres of mineralized land, and the addition of 30,000 acres along the north line of the Metropolitan Water District aqueduct caused many organizations in Southern California to come out for and against the bill.

During the year the Custodian spent much time talking before Chambers of Commerce, conservation groups and other organizations such as the Automobile Club of Southern California and All-Year Club soliciting their support for H.R. 4703. The greatest opposition to the proposed changes in the monument came from mining associations which are reorganizing after being dormant during the war years.

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Reference is made to Acting Director Tolson's memorandum of June 12 (No. FO 388) regarding material for the Director's report to the Secretary.

The following statement is submitted as covering the most significant event of the year at Joshua Tree.

JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL MONUMENT ENDANGERED BY SALE OF PRIVATELY-OWNED LANDS

Joshua Tree National Monument was saved, temporarily at least, to the people this year. The threat that the Southern Pacific Land Company, which owns over 100,000 acres of land in the monument, might someday sell its holdings became an actuality. The company disposed of over 20,000 acres before the Board of Directors of the Southern Pacific Railroad withdrew from sale all its lands in the monument. The withdrawal, to remain effective for six months, provided the Park Service a little time to work up a land acquisition program.

A bill introduced by Congressman Sheppard of California proposed approval of the expenditure of funds for the acquisition of all privately-owned lands. The Department appropriation bill also included an item for acquisition of private lands in Park Service areas. The latter item was deleted from the bill by the appropriation committee and the Sheppard Bill probably will not be reported out of committee.

As a protective measure against the possibility that no funds would be made available by Congress, the Park Service initiated a land exchange program. There appears to be a good chance that all of the Southern Pacific Land Company holdings in the monument can be acquired by exchange providing Departmental approval is obtained.

If the Government acquires by purchase or exchange some or all of the Southern Pacific Land Company property, the monument may be saved. If not, and the land company resumes selling its property, the monument will be sold out from under the Park Service. The new owners will subdivide their land. If this occurs, the monument is lost. The situation is still very critical.

Below is the conservation statement requested:

Practically all the efforts of the Joshua Tree staff last year were devoted to conservation, unfortunately not of flora, fauna and features of interest, but conservation of the monument itself. We are now fighting for the very existence of the area and the wildlife has to take care of itself.

A meeting of the Mining Section of the State Chamber of Commerce on April 17, 1946, in San Bernardino, and one in Riverside, California, called by the Mining Association of the Southwest on May 20 brought to a focus the opposition of mining interests, land speculators, private land owners and hunters to the passage of H.R. 4703 at this session of the Congress.

Investigation of New Park Areas

The Custodian and staff spent considerable time investigating the proposed Palm Canyon National Monument and preparing maps and reports of land status in the area under consideration. The Custodian was accompanied on these inspections by Regional Director Tomlinson and Regional Landscape Architect Hill at different times.

Another stand of Joshua-trees of the variety Yucca brevifolia Jacq. ssp. joshuana in the vicinity of Cima, California, was investigated at the request of the Director and report submitted together with photographs and maps.

Status of Private Lands

The boom in desert land since the termination of hostilities has complicated the private land problem in Joshua Tree National Monument. The Southern Pacific Land Company sold nearly 20,000 acres since last fall of strategically located land to speculators, and some of the land has since changed hands. The Southern Pacific Land Company has temporarily withdrawn its lands in the monument from sale pending the outcome of H.R. 4703 and the three-way exchanges now being worked up with private buyers. If these exchanges fail to materialize, the company stands a good chance of disposing of most of its remaining 116,000 acres in a short space of time.

Two exchanges, with the possibility of one or more in the near future, involving the purchase of Southern Pacific lands in the monument and then exchange for other Government lands outside the monument are being worked up. These two deals, if successfully completed during the coming year, could eliminate about 75,000 acres of the total of railroad lands left in the monument.

Plans, Maps and Surveys

During the year we have been working on a new base map showing triangulation points, section lines, latitude and longitude, drainage, roads and trails. Data have been collected from aerial photographs and U. S. Army topographic sheets where coverage is obtainable.

In addition to the above map we have made fire protection maps, one showing roads and trails, and many land status maps to accompany our land exchange memoranda. Several maps were required for the proposed Palm Canyon National Monument and the investigation carried out near Cima, California.

Several field trips were made locating triangulation points, road intersections and the proposed fire truck trail between Juniper Flat and Covington

Flat. Levels were run in Indian Cove and up Johnson Canyon to check water resources for campsites. A preliminary survey was run up 49 Palms Canyon and a topographical sketch made of the oasis area. A stadia traverse was run to locate Cottonwood Spring in relation to triangulation stations and section corners for a proposed water-right application.

Maintenance

Lack of funds made it necessary during the first three and a half months of the year for the Custodian and Clerk-Ranger to take turns running the grader to repair storm damage to monument roads. Mr. Boling was entered on duty October 24 and Mr. Lake December 12. The latter took over as road foreman and grader operator. Mr. Camp, when relieved from his job as Fire Guard in the fall, also joined the road crew as laborer and a fourth man was hired to work on roads.

Considering the washing of the roads due to rain, the natural erosion due to wear and wind action, the road system was kept in fairly good shape for the period of heaviest visitation from October to April, inclusive. Due to lack of rain since January, the roads have suffered and in May the road crew, with the exception of Mr. Lake, was laid off until the beginning of the new fiscal year or until funds are made available for road maintenance.

Cooperating Governmental Agencies

Information and maps were secured from the Indian Service in connection with our Palms Canyon National Monument study. Much-needed equipment, such as grader tires, and repairs to our truck were procured from the Forest Service Depot at Arcadia, California.

Cooperating Non-governmental Agencies

Botanists from the California Institute of Technology and zoologists from the University of California Museum of Vertebrate Zoology were in the monument several different times doing research work in their respective fields.

Protection

With only two men on the permanent staff during most of the year, or until Mr. Stratton returned from the Army for the last two months, we could not give much time to protecting the monument from hunters, vandals and others who destroy the vegetation, shoot game and mutilate the landscape generally.

With increased visitation and the growth of communities on the northern edge of the monument, it will be more important than in the past to patrol the boundaries in the future.

Forest Fire Protection

Our best fire protection still is the County of San Bernardino and the State Division of Forestry fire station in Twentynine Palms and their fire

patrol pickup truck in Morongo Valley. We were disappointed this spring when we failed to secure a bulldozer for fire suppression. After being on fires with the State Division of Forestry and the U. S. Forest Service we see how valuable a piece of equipment it can be in knocking down a fire in vegetation such as we have in the monument.

Our Fire Control Aide and a part-time Aide for two days per week have been carrying out patrols daily and, in addition, cleaning up debris and inflammable material around campsites and along the roads to lessen the fire hazard. Summer dry lightning storms, however, cannot be controlled readily, so they must be alert and cover as much territory daily as possible. At present they drive about 100 miles each day in the more critical areas in the western part of the monument. One 160-acre fire broke out in June outside the monument near Yucca Valley, but the wind carried it away from our boundary. With this exception, we have no fires to report in or near the monument this year to date and we hope the summer rains will come to our aid shortly.

John W. Stratton
Acting Custodian

cc: Regional Director
Region Four