



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
SOUTHEAST REGION, P. O. BOX 10003  
FEDERAL BUILDING, RICHMOND, VA. 23240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

N1427 SER(ORP)

January 14, 1970

SERO Informational 70-10

Memorandum

To: Superintendents, Southeast Region

From: Acting Assistant Regional Director, Operations,  
Southeast Region

Subject: Bears in National Parks

For immediate implementation

For general information

For advance information - additional instructions  
will follow.

The attached statement, "Bears in National Parks," received in this office on January 12, was prepared in response to many inquiries concerning our management of bears in the parks. This memorandum states clearly the stand of the Service in this matter and should be brought to the attention of all personnel so that inquiries on the subject will be answered in accordance with Service policy.

Donald S. Nutt

Enclosure



# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

January 1970

## Statement, BEARS IN NATIONAL PARKS

We do not deny that the grizzly bears are dangerous to man. They are. This is especially true when bears and people are together in areas such as campgrounds. Because the bears are potentially hazardous to park visitors, a number of writers have advocated that the bears be eliminated from the national parks. We do not believe that such drastic action is justified, and the majority of people who have written to us believe that the bears should be protected from man.

Our policies toward wildlife in national parks have not changed. We still believe we are responsible to all Americans to maintain the maximum diversity of native wildlife at levels that approximate the natural distribution and abundance of each species for their aesthetic, educational, and scientific values. At the present time the grizzly bear is not naturally distributed throughout the parks. It is concentrated near the large campgrounds. Before we can restore it to a more normal distribution we must know why a generally shy animal like the grizzly is attracted to areas where there are lots of people. The answer is simple: The grizzly, like all bears, is an opportunist when it comes to food; it will eat whatever is most abundant and easiest to obtain. In national parks, man is a provident supplier of bear food in the form of garbage, picnic baskets, and hand-held cookies.

Of the three, garbage is probably the main bear attractant. We believe if we can totally eliminate this source of food from the bear's diet, there will be a significant drop in the number of bear problems. Visitors to Yellowstone, for example, may note that all of the trash containers have bear-proof tops. Installing these devices is only the first step in our efforts to restore the bear populations to the "wild" state. Next we plan to phase out the open garbage dumps that have been holding large grizzly bear populations in the vicinity of the major campgrounds. Simultaneously with the closing of the dumps, we want to provide better protection for the camper's food chest.

Some people refuse to follow instructions concerning the safe storage of food. This problem gives us a good deal of concern, because as the dumps are closed some of the bears may devote more of their time to breaking into unguarded food chests. Therefore, we will have to increase the number of Park Rangers assigned to campgrounds to insure that no food is made available to the bears.

We anticipate that most bears will be readily restored to a diet of natural foods. A few bears, however, may be so firmly dependent of man's food that they cannot readjust to wilderness living. Such bears

Statement, Bears in National Parks, continued

will have to be removed from the population, as generally these bears are very aggressive and have lost all fear and respect of man. We have received many suggestions that the problem bears be captured with tranquilizer guns and moved to some remote part of the park, rather than killed. This technique is used, and all bears are given at least two chances to readjust. In the past this method has not always been successful. There have been some cases where the bears very nearly beat the Park Rangers back to the campgrounds. Bears have a very good homing instinct and will travel considerable distances to get back home; one brown bear that was captured in Katmai National Monument, Alaska, and airlifted 125 miles away returned to the place from which it was captured. Also, as many will realize, moving a known "bad" bear will not resolve the problem, but merely transfer it to another location. Therefore, we believe the best solution is to prevent bears from becoming "bad" by totally eliminating from their diet all food introduced into the national parks by man.

Enforcing the rules against feeding and molesting bears is difficult, because the violation must be committed in the presence of the arresting officer, or a witness who is willing to testify. Most violators know better, and do not do those foolish things when a Park Ranger is around; unfortunately, very few people can afford to sacrifice their vacation time in order to appear as witnesses. But it is interesting to note that a number of people are apprehended each year for feeding bears, and they do receive rather stiff fines. Perhaps when the bears are completely restored to the wild, the opportunities to feed them cookies and marshmallows and stale sandwiches will be less.

The grizzly bear, bald eagle, wolf, and alligator have become symbols of man's stress on the environment. Many of us believe that these animals should be saved just because they are a part of our natural heritage. But other reasons are also important. As one ecologist said recently:

"Perhaps the best nonemotional reason for seeking to retain a few species is for the practice it may give in picking what should be saved. If man cannot save the bald eagle and other frills, it follows that he will never be able to save himself."

\* \* \* \* \*