

OUTDOOR RECREATION: IS A NEW COMMISSION NEEDED?

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ISSUE DEFINITION

Many of the major policy elements of outdoor recreation now in law are the result of a nationwide assessment of recreation undertaken in 1958 and completed in 1962. That assessment was done by the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC), a bipartisan body consisting of eight members of Congress and seven private citizens appointed by the President. Laurance S. Rockefeller served as chairman of the Commission.

Since that time, there have been considerable changes in demographics, economic resources, and technology. There is some interest at present in creating a new commission to make a comprehensive survey of recreation resources in the United States. This minibrief examines the history and accomplishments of the first commission, and describes the Rockefeller Report of 1983 calling for a new commission.

BACKGROUND

When ORRRC was authorized by P.L. 85-470, America faced a burgeoning demand for outdoor recreation opportunities. This demand was felt at all levels of government, Federal, State and local, as the population enjoyed increased affluence, mobility, and leisure time. Traditional outdoor recreation pursuits such as camping, swimming, hunting, fishing and hiking were popular activities. The problems lay in the facts that, outside the public lands States, there was only a limited supply of suitable recreation lands and facilities, and public funds for recreation were in short supply everywhere.

The House report on the 1958 legislation (H.Rept. 85-1386) cited another element of concern in addition to rapidly increasing demands on outdoor recreation sites: "we have experienced a steady, and alarming decrease in the quality and quantity of these resources and opportunities". It continues:

It is imperative that the outdoor-recreation resources of the United States henceforth be accorded the same recognition and consideration as all other resources which are essential to the economic and social welfare of the Nation. Outdoor-recreation resource use and development must be evaluated and carefully planned on a long-range basis. Our Nation can no longer afford the extravagance of the piecemeal planning, neglect, and indifference which has prevailed in the past.

The Work of the Commission

The Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission contracted for the production of 27 specific recreation reports. These reports still serve as an important benchmark in many areas of recreation research and policy formulation.

ORRRC also drew upon the expertise of an appointed advisory council representing a broad range of recreation-related subject areas, and upon a cadre of liaison officials appointed by the several Federal agencies dealing

with recreation.

The capstone of over 3 years of work by the Commission was its report, Outdoor Recreation for America, issued in January 1962. The findings of the Commission largely shaped the thinking of recreation policy makers for the following 20 years, and the legislative enactment of its recommendations created the core of Federal recreation programs.

Among the legislative recommendations made by ORRRC were:

1. creation of a Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in the Federal government;
2. establishment of a financial assistance program for the States for recreation land acquisition and facility development;
3. preservation of certain free-flowing rivers in their natural setting;
4. preservation of certain primitive areas as wilderness areas; and
5. initiation of comprehensive recreation planning at the State and Federal levels.

Additionally, the Commission recommended many policy and management changes and innovations to increase the magnitude and diversity of recreation opportunities available to the public.

Congressional Action on the ORRRC Recommendations

The Congressional members of the Commission when it concluded were Senators Clinton Anderson, Henry Dworshak, Henry Jackson, and Jack Miller, and Representatives John Saylor, Gracie Pfof, Ralph Rivers, and John Kyl. The legislative work load stemming from ORRRC consisted of a variety of recreation and conservation measures during the decade of the 1960s.

Among the enactments implementing recommendations of the Commission were:

1. Outdoor Recreation Programs, P.L. 88-29.
This authorized the Secretary of the Interior to develop and coordinate Federal recreation programs, facilitate recreation research, and develop and update a nationwide outdoor recreation plan. The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation was administratively designated within the Department of the Interior on the basis of the authority contained in this Act.
2. The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, P.L. 88-578.
This provided for Federal funding support of State and local recreation planning, acquisition, and development programs on a matching basis, and for the acquisition of lands and waters for Federal recreation areas.
3. The Wilderness Act, P.L. 88-577.
This authorized establishment of a national wilderness

preservation system encompassing Congressionally designated lands within the National Park, National Forest, and National Wildlife Refuge systems.

4. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, P.L. 90-542. This designated eight rivers as off limits to Federally built or assisted water projects that would destroy the free-flowing character of the rivers, and provided for the study of other rivers for possible congressional addition to the system.

Other enactments by the Congress have expanded upon the systems authorized by the above laws. There has also been a marked growth of the National Park System as new units, particularly in the East, have been approved.

Beyond the clearly recreational programs and policies that they established since ORRRC, some legislative enactments demonstrate the influence of the Commission and its work upon the environmental protection effort of the late 60s and the 70s. The Clean Water Act's goal of swimmable, fishable waters is seen as an extension of the new recreation laws that authorized new systems or units. To an extent, the old conservation organizations that worked to secure the passage of the original ORRRC legislation and to ensure implementation of its recommendations have become front line proponents of environmental legislation today.

Outdoor Recreation 20 Years Later

The guidance provided by ORRRC was based upon estimates of recreation supply and demand for the years 1976 and 2000. For that first date, the estimates, while not on target, were quite useful. The differences between projection and reality for the year 2000 may be considerable. The margin may be so much that the projections if not soon adjusted may serve little purpose in planning or policy formulation.

The reasons for the deviation from the estimates are found in the sizable changes that have taken place in the American economy and demographics and in the social and cultural changes that have occurred since 1962.

In the recreation area alone, new technologies have generated high demand for recreational activities that the Commission either did not consider, or anticipated as minimal. Hang gliding and white-water boating are examples of the unforeseen, as are snowmobiles and wheeled off-road vehicles. Mobility became a byword for American recreationists.

This mobility, whether for recreation or commuting to work, was threatened by two energy supply crises during the 1970s. Fuel costs became a matter for consideration in planning recreation and travel as the American tradition of cheap energy came to an end.

The post-WW II baby boom surged into the marketplace as young adults wanting a wide range of recreational opportunities readily available to them. Increasingly, the supplier of those recreational opportunities came to be the private sector. At the same time, there was a blurring of the distinction of outdoor recreation and indoor recreation. Swimming, tennis, running, and skating, it was found, were enjoyable under cover as well as in the open. The Congress debated over several years the appropriateness of allowing States and localities to use Land and Water Conservation Fund monies to build

sheltered recreation facilities.

The major changes in American society have led to an interest in conducting, once again, a nationwide examination of recreation in America, focusing upon the roles of all levels of government and the private sector and upon the policy and programmatic framework that has been created. Interested individuals and organizations are asking what would be the best mix of roles, policies, and programs to ensure a full range of recreation opportunities until the year 2000.

Some find this an anomalous time to be concerned with recreation, in that we have just undergone a deep recession and are only now seeing indications of recovery. They feel other social, economic and national policy concerns are of far higher priority, and note that the last two decades have seen an extensive program of Federal assistance in recreation.

Proponents of renewed attention to recreation claim this attitude ignores the economic importance of recreation and leisure activity. They note estimates that as much as \$250 billion is spent annually on leisure activities in America and that one out of every 15 jobs is associated with the recreation industry. Further, they claim, this area of activity holds the potential for creation of many new jobs, unlike the prospects for many of our older, traditional industries.

The Rockefeller Report of 1983

The utility of a reassessment of recreation in America has been argued in analyses from a number of sources including the American Recreation Coalition and the National Recreation and Park Association. Such a reassessment has been recommended by the National Conference on Renewable Natural Resources organized in 1980 by the American Forestry Association and a score of other conservation, environmental, and resource user groups.

The most recent initiative in support of a new review of recreation came from the Outdoor Recreation Policy Review Group. This seven man committee was organized by Laurance S. Rockefeller, chairman of the 1958-1962 Commission. The group was formed because of Rockefeller's interest in the efforts of Washington-based organizations to secure a reassessment.

The Policy Review Group met through the past fall and winter, listened to presentations from specialists, discussed the topic among themselves and with others, and reached the conclusion that "in light of new realities there should be a new, hard look at outdoor recreation policy."

The group offered these findings as a result of its review:

1. The two decades since ORRRC have been a period of great social and economic change.
2. Changes in how and where we live, work, and play have had a profound effect on outdoor recreation.
3. Despite the changes over the past 20 years, or perhaps because of them, outdoor recreation is more important in American life than it was in 1962.
4. Governments in general are doing less for outdoor

recreation than is required to meet the need.

5. The role of the Federal Government needs to be reassessed, redefined, and revived.
6. The private sector is providing more outdoor recreation than it did 20 years ago; it could do even more with Government cooperation.
7. There are ways in which outdoor recreation could be provided to meet increased demands which would not require huge public expense.
8. There is a need for improved information as the basis for outdoor recreation planning and management.

The recommendation of the group, based upon these findings, was for the creation by the Congress of a new, bipartisan commission, on the model of ORRRC, to re-examine nationwide the problems and opportunities associated with recreation. While suggesting ORRRC as the organizational model, the group recognized the great change that has taken place in defining recreation now, as compared with 20 years ago. Its report stated:

The mandate of the new commission should be broader than the original ORRRC. It cannot ignore, for example, the interrelationships and overlaps of outdoor recreation with many indoor activities associated with physical fitness. The new study should also recognize that outdoor recreation is just one use of leisure time -- albeit an important one -- and that it is related to other leisure time activities. Further, outdoor recreation is linked, in ways that have not been adequately researched, to such factors as job satisfaction and productivity, and family and social cohesion. Urban recreation also is an important part of the leisure time equation. The link between outdoor recreation, environmental quality, and resources management also is an important subject for consideration. All these factors should be examined, but the focus of the new ORRRC's work should be on the interaction of people and outdoor resources.

Draft legislation to authorize a new National Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission was prepared and circulated among Members of Congress. Senator Malcolm Wallop and 27 co-sponsors introduced the measure as S.1090 on Apr. 19, 1983. Representative Morris Udall and 2 cosponsors introduced a companion measure, H.R. 2837, on Apr. 28, 1983.

Hearings on S. 1090 were held by the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs on June 28, 1983. All witnesses testified in support of the measure, although some suggested changes in the scope of the Commission's work and in the size and means of appointing the Commission. In marking up the bill, the Governmental Affairs Committee addressed the latter points. The committee amended S. 1090 by increasing the size of the proposed Commission from 15 to 21 members. The Senate and the House were authorized to name the six additional commissioners, each chamber to pick three private citizens in addition to four Members from each chamber.

Governmental Affairs also recast the language describing the kinds of interests and organizations to be represented on the advisory council, adding

research and academic institutions with special knowledge of leisure, recreation, natural resources and the environment. Other changes made by the committee were essentially technical or perfecting in nature.

S. 1090 was referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for a period of 60 days beginning when Congress reconvened on Sept. 12, 1983. Senator Malcolm Wallop, bill sponsor and chairman of the Subcommittee on Public Lands and Reserved Water, held a hearing on the bill on Sept. 23, 1983. Again, all witnesses testified in support of the measure, suggesting some additional refinements or broadening of scope of the Commission's work.

The bill was favorably reported on Nov. 4, 1983 (S.Rept. 98-299) with additional amendments. Among the changes were several emphasizing that the Commission was to be primarily concerned with "outdoor" recreation in both "urban or non-urban areas". The President pro tempore, rather than the President of the Senate, was designated as the individual to name the Senators and three Senate-designated private citizen members to the Commission, with the advice of the majority leader.

The Senate adopted these amendments and passed S. 1090 by unanimous consent on Nov. 18, 1983. The measure was sent to the House of Representatives where over 100 Members have cosponsored H.R. 2837, a bill identical to that first introduced in the Senate. Referral in the House was to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs.