

Echological characteristics of New Parks

Ștefan Carolina¹, Chisăliță I.¹, Moatăr Maria Mihaela¹, Solomonesc A.², Olaru Daniela¹, Banu C.¹, Fora C. G.¹,

¹Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Timișoara, Faculty of Horticulture and Forestry; ²Forestry Department Reșița

*Corresponding author. Email: carolina_stefan@yahoo.com

Abstract No institution is more symbolic of the conservation movement in the United States than the national parks. Although other approaches to conservation, such as the national forests, each have their own following, only the national parks have had both the individuality and uniqueness to fix an indelible image on the American mind. The components of that image are the subject of this volume. What follows, then, is an interpretative history; people, events, and legislation are treated only as they pertain to the idea of national parks. For this reason I have not found it necessary to cover every park in detail; similarly, it would be impossible in the scope of one book to consider the multitude of recreation areas, military parks, historic sites, and urban preserves now often ranked with the national parks proper. Most of the themes relevant to the prime natural areas still have direct application throughout the national park system, particularly with respect to the problems of maintaining the character and integrity of the parks once they have been established.

Key words

park, natural areas, historic sites, conservation

The indifference of Congress to the infringement of commercialization on Gettysburg National Military Park, for example, is traceable to the same pressures for development which have led to the resort atmosphere in portions of Yosemite, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and other parks.

The reluctance of most historians and writers to dwell on the negative themes of national park history is understandable. National parks stand for the unselfish side of conservation. Take away the national park idea and the conservation movement loses its spirit of idealism and altruism. National parks justify the conviction that the United States has been as committed to do what is "right" for the environment as what is mandatory to ensure the productivity of the nation's natural resources. Without the national parks the history of conservation becomes predictable and therefore ordinary. Taking precautions to ward off the possibility of running out of natural resources was only common sense.

Material and Methods

The history of the national park idea is indeed filled with examples of statesmanship and philanthropy. Still, there has been a tendency among historians to put the national parks on a pedestal, to interpret the park idea as evidence of an unqualified revulsion against disruption of the environment. It would be comforting to believe that the national park idea originated in a deep and uncompromising love of the land for its own sake. Such a circumstance—much

like the common assertion that Indians were the first "ecologists"—would reassure modern environmentalists they need only recapture the spirit of the past to acquire ecological wisdom and respect. But in fact, the national park idea evolved to fulfill cultural rather than environmental needs. The search for a distinct national identity, more than what have come to be called "the rights of rocks," was the initial impetus behind scenic preservation. Nor did the United States overrule economic considerations in the selection of the areas to be included in the national parks. Even today the reserves are not allowed to interfere with the material progress of the nation.

It has been as hard to develop in the American public a concern for the environment in and of itself within the national parks as it has outside of them. For example, despite the public's growing sensitivity to environmental issues, the large majority of park visitors still shun the trails for the comfort and convenience of automobiles. Most of these enthusiasts, like their predecessors, continue to see the national parks as a parade of natural "wonders," as a string of phenomena to be photographed and deserted in haste. Thus while the nation professes an awareness of the interrelationships of all living things, outmoded perceptions remain a hindrance to the realization. Much as for Yosemite Valley and Yellowstone, monumentalism and economic worthlessness were predetermining factors leading to the establishment of Yosemite, Sequoia, and General Grant national parks. And even if it was an unwritten policy, no qualification outweighed the precedent of "useless" scenery; only

where scenic nationalism did not conflict with materialism could the national park idea further expand. First to exemplify the interplay of both forces after 1890 was Washington State's Mount Rainier. Rising majestically above its encircling forests, the extinct volcano invited the cultural fantasies so prevalent during the opening decades of the national park idea. "I could have summoned back the whole unique world of mythology and domiciled it upon this greater and grander Olympus," declared one preservationist. Before Mount Rainier "the mild glories of the Alps and Apennines grow anemic and dull," while from its summit "the tower of Babel would have been hardly more visible than one of the church spires of a Puget Sound city." Yet only as a national park, he cautioned in conclusion, would "its fame widen with the years, and "our great army of tourists gain a new pleasure, a larger artistic sense, and a higher inspiration from the contemplation of the grandeur and beauty of this St. Peter's of the skies."

Again it remained for John Muir to sound a note of caution and thereby reveal the second and more important criterion of scenic preservation. Specifically, he feared the proposed park would in fact include only the high country and ignore the foothills where protection was required most. "The icy dome needs none of man's care," he maintained, "but unless the reserve is guarded the flower bloom will soon be killed, and nothing of the forests will be left but black stump monuments." Monumentalism, of course, was precisely what Congress had in mind. As Muir agonized, Congress' generosity in the Cascade Mountains, no less than in the Rockies or Sierra Nevada, was still bound by the compulsion to keep parks to the minimum area necessary for highlighting their focal "wonders." As written in 1899, the Mount Rainier Park Act failed to preserve many of the lowland environments Muir initially singled out as equally worthy of protection. Moreover, even above timberline Congress did not relax its caution. Just in case first impressions of the peak's worthlessness proved erroneous, Congress allowed both mining and exploring for minerals in the park to continue.

A still more obvious concession to economic interests was perpetrated in the form of a land exchange between the government and the Northern Pacific Railroad. In return for the company's claim to portions of the mountain, the government allowed the line to select compensation from federal property in any other state served by its tracks. Naturally the trade worked to the advantage of the Northern Pacific, which divested itself of rugged, marginally-productive land at the expense of the nation at large. Thus Mount Rainier National Park itself can be interpreted as an example of scenic preservation designed to the specifications of big business and frontier individualism, not the needs of the environment.

Results

The prerequisite that national parks be worthless was also mandatory in the discussions leading to the protection of Crater Lake in Oregon. Originally the site formed the crest of ancient Mount Mazama, which, like Rainier, was once among the active volcanoes of the Cascade Range. Several thousand years ago a violent eruption capsized the summit and left the huge cavity in its stead. Over the century's rain and melting snows filled the crater to a depth of nearly 2,000 feet. It was therefore evident natural resources in the area would be limited; again the value of the wonderland was recognized to be strictly monumental. Among the earliest visitors to publicize Crater Lake in this vein was William Gladstone Steel, the Portland judge whose dedication and persistence led to park status in 1902. "To those living in New York City"—he said, offering the standard form of description—"I would say, Crater Lake is large enough to have Manhattan, Randall's, Wards and Blackwell's Island dropped into it, side by side without touching the walls, or, Chicago and Washington City might do the same." At Crater Lake "all ingenuity of nature seems to have been exerted to the fullest capacity to build one grand, awe-inspiring temple" the likes of which the world had never seen. Approval of the park by Congress, however, still hinged on proof of its worthlessness for all but the most marginal economic returns. In this vein Thomas H. Tongue of Oregon introduced Crater Lake to the House of Representatives as "a very small affair—only eighteen by twenty-two miles," containing "no agricultural land of any kind." Instead the proposed park was simply "a mountain, a little more than 9,000 feet in altitude, whose summit [had] been destroyed by volcanic action," and was "now occupied by a gigantic caldron nearly 6 miles in diameter and 4,000 feet in depth." In addition, he reassured his colleagues, he had insisted at the outset that the boundaries be laid out "so as to include no valuable land." The object of the bill was "simply to withdraw this land from public settlement [to protect] its great beauty and great scientific value."

Conclusions

Few members of the House opposed the preservation of Crater Lake; they merely wished to make certain that a park would in fact protect no more than the wonder itself. John H. Stephens of Texas, for example, quizzed Representative Tongue about the potential for mineral deposits within the reserve proper. Tongue answered by repeating his assurance that "nothing of any value" was to be set aside. Yet the bill as introduced actually prohibited exploring for minerals. He clarified that the restriction was meant only to keep people from entering the reserve "under the name of prospecting when their real intent was to

destroy” the natural conditions c: the park and the natural objects of beauty and interest.”

The House grew more skeptical, however; indeed, no one supported Tongue's confidence that the nearest mineral deposit of consequence were “in the other range of mountains opposite from” Crater Lake. Not until he had agreed to amend the bill to allow mining in the preserve did the House reconsider the motion and call for a vote. The compromise in effect negated wording that the national park was to be “forever.” This phrase was the first recognition of the concept of “inalienable preservation since the Yosemite Act of 1864. Thus amended; the Crater Lake park bill cleared the House, passed the Senate without debate.

As exemplified by the restriction of Mount Rainier and Crater Lake national parks to their focal wonders, the national park idea at the beginning of the twentieth century was little changed from its original purpose of protecting a unique visitor's experience. Those who challenged the inadequacy of the park-in terms of their size, moreover, still did so against growing pressures for systematic reductions of the reserves instead. The frustration of compromise was further compounded by the rising popularity of what has come to be called the “utilitarian” conservation movement. Professional foresters, for example, argued that trees should not be preserved indefinitely, but rather should be grown much like crops, albeit ones “harvested” at 50-, 75-, or 100-year intervals. Similarly, hydrologists and civil engineers maintained that rivers should be dammed and their waters distributed for irrigation, desert reclamation, and other “practical” ends; to allow natural drainage was considered “wasteful.” Americans must work to stabilize their environment by manipulating natural cycles to achieve greater industrial and agricultural efficiency. Only then would mankind's historical dependence on the whims of nature be overcome.

The persuasiveness of utilitarian conservation, as opposed to absolute preservation, lay in its obvious link with the pioneer ethic. After all, to use resources wisely was still to use them. It followed that advocates of the national parks regained at a great disadvantage. Not only did each park suffer from the reluctance of Congress to abolish outright any claims to existing resources, but also until park visitation itself - measurably increased, preservationists had no recognized “use” of their own to counter the objections of those who considered scenic preservation an extravagance. In this regard re geography of preservation worked against the permanence; the national park idea. Although nine-tenths of the population lived in the eastern half of the country, prior to 1919 every major preserve was in the West.⁹ On a positive note, each year the number of rail passengers to the national parks showed decided increases. Still, not until the 1920s, when mass production of the automobile democratized long-distance travel, were the reserves truly within reach of middle-class as well as upper-class visitors.

References

1. Aikman L. – Herbs for all seasons, National Geographic, vol.163, nr.3, U.S.A, 1983.
2. Bohm, C. – Gartenhandbuch, Verlag Paul Parey, Berlin, Hamburg, 1987.
3. Enge, T.O., Schroer C.F. – Garden Architecture in Europe.1450-1800.Benedict Taschen Verlag, Koln, 1990.
4. Gorohov, V.A., Lunts, L.B. – Parki mira, Moskva, 1985.
5. Krussmann, G. – Rosen, Rosen, Rosen, Verlag P.Parey Hamburg, 1986.
6. Runte, A. – National parks, 1990 .