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THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE'S ROLE IN OUTDOOR RECREATION

Conservation and outdoor recreation are now front page news and a subject of almost daily debate in Congress. This didn't "just happen." It happened because people cared--people like you. A few cared at first, now a lot of people care. The National Recreation and Park Association deserves a large share of the credit for causing this to happen.

Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman, in his role as a Trustee of the National Recreation and Park Association, at the Congress for Recreation and Parks at Miami Beach last December stated, "What we do with our national resources, our recreation potentials, our parks, playgrounds and forests can make the difference between a life of subhuman existence and a life in which the human spirit may flower in a higher level civilization."

"If we fail," he said, "those who follow us cannot enjoy the quality in American life which they have a right to expect. This common interest of ours must somehow be communicated to all Americans."

"Public demand for outdoor recreation use of our natural resources is substantial and growing," he noted. "The potential is great. The problems are many. We need to use our ingenuity and creativity to keep ahead of the changing needs and interests of Americans for outdoor recreation--for change is certain."

Later in the day, you will be hearing from the top USDA people concerned with recreation. They will outline the wide-ranging Department

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Remarks by Norman A. Berg, Deputy Administrator for Field Services, Soil Conservation Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture to the National Recreation and Park Association Federal Assistance Institute, Tuesday, May 7, 1968, Ambassador Hotel, Washington, D. C.

programs in more detail. Our Department has resources that can help you. You, in turn, can help us enormously in our efforts to operate our programs more imaginatively and effectively.

USDA got into the recreation business in bits and pieces, over a period of many years, as additional authorities were granted by the Congress.

The Forest Service, of course, has been in the recreation business since its founding, back in the early 1900's, both because of the nature of the lands it administers and because of the foresight of some of its early Chiefs.

Long before passage of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962, the Soil Conservation Service, Farmers Home Administration, and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service had limited authority to foster recreational development and did much with what they had. But the 1962 Act--sometimes called a Charter for Rural America--greatly expanded this authority. It amended Public Law 566 to include recreation in small watersheds, it allowed us to include planning and technical assistance for recreation on public and private lands, and it gave us authority for Resource Conservation and Development Projects.

The Department's recreation efforts got another boost in 1965 when the Congress provided for recreation and wildlife conservation measures under the Cropland Adjustment Program and for parks under the Greenspan Program.

The Farmers Home Administration now has authority to make loans to local nonprofit organizations engaged in recreation, as well as to provide

loans to private individuals interested in income-producing recreation enterprises as a part of their farm business.

We have put millions of acres no longer needed for food production to work providing recreation and wildlife habitat, rather than lying idle. We have put several hundred thousand acres of water to work providing recreation--in addition to flood control. And we have launched 41 Resource Conservation and Development projects.

We are especially proud of these RC&D projects. Many of them wrap up water-based recreation, municipal water supply and flood control into one package. All are planned in such a way that resource development is keyed into the overall community development, and recreation is given prime consideration. RC&D project areas provide tangible examples of how soundly planned recreation resources can make a community a more attractive place to live, work, and play.

In doing all these things we leaned heavily on the multiple-use concept pioneered by USDA's Forest Service. In the National Forests, the same public domain that provides a timber harvest also provides recreation, serves as a watershed, conserves the soil ... perhaps grazes cattle.

Similarly on private land, an acre of cropland, taken out of production in the national interest, can still serve the national interest by providing cover for game and open space for city residents. The same dam that protects us from floods can also impound water for boating, picnicking, fishing, and boost the local economy by attracting a new industrial plant.

And so, bit by bit, over the years, we hammered out viable recreation programs in USDA. Then the time came to graduate from a piecemeal approach. More than 2 years ago, an overall Department policy for recreation, one that would program recreation as a primary Department mission, was developed.

The result is a USDA recreation policy that encompasses both public lands in the National Forests and the three-quarters of United States land area in private hands.

Some 66 percent of our population lives east of the Mississippi River, yet only little over 8 percent of the National Forests lie in the East.

The population center of the United States--that point on which the U. S. would "balance" if every person in it weighed the same--is in Illinois.

The "National Forest Centerline"--that line on which there is as much National Forest acreage to the east as to the west--runs through Western Wyoming, somewhere near Rock Springs.

And so the majority of the public lands are where the majority of the people aren't, and this has important ramifications in the Department's recreational policy. For while we are bending every effort to upgrade the National Forests' recreation potential, we are also making plans to put recreation where the people are.

The imbalance in public recreation areas with the population and the overriding need of our people for additional outdoor recreation--went into the Department's basic recreational policy and affected our specific policy on recreation on private lands, issued less than 1 year ago.

Highlights of this policy are:

1. More emphasis is placed on recreation developments on private lands, for those landowners who want to build them and have the capacity to manage them, with a view toward providing the recreational opportunities needed and desired by the American people.

2. USDA agencies have been directed to provide the research, technical, educational, and financial help needed to strengthen existing programs for private lands recreation. A high priority has been assigned to these programs.

3. Special attention is devoted to income-producing recreation in low-income rural areas as a means of creating more jobs and new sources of income.

4. USDA seeks to establish recreation development in connection with each watershed project carried out with public help.

5. Recreation research will be greatly expanded to catalog private lands suitable for recreation, to determine what the recreation-consuming public wants, and to discover the thousand-and-one items that spell success or failure for an individual enterprise.

The goals we hope to achieve with our private lands policy are these:

First, we hope to create a geographic pattern of development that puts more recreation facilities where the people are.

Second, we hope to provide a proper "mix" of outdoor recreation so that families of all economic levels--rich or poor--can satisfy their individual needs; one that provide for the varying recreational tastes of this pluralistic Nation.

This is important. Peoples' taste in recreation varies as much as their taste in houses, automobiles, or clothes. A proper mix of recreational facilities--everything from a farm-based vacation... swimming in an RC&D Lake...skiing in the National Forests...to the solitude of wilderness--is vital. A broadly based recreation policy has the best chance of success.

Such a policy won't succeed without planning at all levels. The importance of planning at the local level cannot be overstated. Planning provides local government with guidelines for making recreation a living part of overall development plans. Growth--industrial, residential, recreational--can proceed in a logical, effective manner with sound planning.

Without planning, growth is often chaotic and fragmented and the important often overshadowed by the immediate. Without a total planning effort, recreation is all too often ignored or overlooked, or it occurs only as an afterthought rather than a prime consideration.

A good blueprint requires a good draftsman. But today, all too many rural areas--and many urban areas too--lack the trained, professional recreation planners needed to help prepare comprehensive programs of community development. As a result, requests for Federal assistance--for recreation and other purposes--are often rejected as unsound or are subject to frustrating and time-consuming delays.

Planning--and especially planning for recreation--is something that should be done at the local level. The action more appropriately originates at the local level rather than at the Federal level. And so one of the best things that NRPA--and other organizations like it--can do, is to get behind

local leaders and needed legislation that will make it possible for communities to develop and carry out recreation planning concurrent with all other planning.

If this is done, then the various programs you're examining at this meeting from Agriculture, Interior, HUD and others have a good chance to succeed. But without this sound planning foundation, without a blueprint... the local recreation complex, the golf course, or the multipurpose watershed development may not get off the drawing board.

As professionals you are all familiar with the relentless statistics of recreation supply and demand. You are aware that land suitable for outdoor recreation is a fixed resource getting scarcer and more expensive with each passing year. You are aware of the almost geometric growth of pollution that is rapidly destroying much of our outdoor recreation potential.

The two problems--vanishing recreation space and growing pollution--are intertwined. In solving one, we can be well on the way to solving the other.

Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman has stated on many occasions, "The total cost to the Nation of our careless lack of planning in urban, suburban, and rural America is beyond our power to calculate. And it is growing. Today, 70 percent of our people live on 1 percent of the land; 30 percent on the other 99 percent.

"Is that good for the people and the Nation? If not, why not? Should we have a clearly defined policy of urban-rural balance or should we let matters drift? Should we give a high investment priority to

"These questions demand an answer."

Reshaping the total environment to make for quality living in both the city and the countryside can't possibly take place if another 80 to 100 million people pour into the Nation's cities. This is where they will pour if present trends continue over the next three decades. We can no longer afford to "fly by the seat of our pants."

More opportunities to live, to work, to play must be made available in the less crowded communities to reverse the trend toward overcrowded cities. We need to learn to take the longview, to think along broad lines emphasizing human goals and values, and to act rather than react. We cannot continue to rely on a crisis-to-crisis approach in handling our environmental affairs.

"Resources in Action," a recent USDA publication, is the product of Department-wide studies under the direct leadership of Secretary Freeman. The resource conservation mission of USDA is redefined in light of needs today and for the remainder of this century. Timely new policies and goals are outlined. Under the heading, "Provide Creative Opportunities for Outdoor Recreation" the following policies are stated:

1. To insure balance in outdoor recreation through comprehensive planning and development.
2. To supply technical and financial assistance and information to stimulate development.
3. To encourage private endeavor, individual initiative, and leadership among rural groups and organizations in the development of rural recreation enterprises to improve communities and enhance rural living.



4. To provide guidance and necessary assistance in conducting inventories of land, water, and related resources to determine their full potential for outdoor recreation development.

5. To fully utilize National Forest resources through multiple-use planning.

6. To work closely with State and Federal fish and game agencies in providing the habitat needed by fish and wildlife and to help meet increasing hunting and fishing pressures.

One example of an action already started in line with these policies is the appraisal of the potentials for recreation development now being made in several hundred counties throughout the Nation. Local representatives of USDA agencies and other Federal, State, and local agencies working with organizations and leaders at the county level judge the adaptability of various recreation enterprises to their communities. No doubt many of you have been, or will be, called on to participate in making these appraisals. This is an excellent example of cooperation between your agency or organization, USDA agencies, and the local leaders.

(Show Steuben County, New York appraisal publications.)

I would like to point out a few of the services provided by USDA that may be helpful to you:

1. Research - Finding the best turf grass for play areas is just one example of how USDA research in cooperation with your State Agricultural Experiment Station may help you. Field trials of various plant materials

2. Park and other Recreation Area Planning - Locating parks and playgrounds on suitable sites is facilitated by using soil survey maps interpreted to indicate both desirable qualities and hazards on each proposed location. Hazards of flooding, pollution, excessive erosion, poor construction sites for buildings, roads, and trails, and soils that do not withstand pedestrian traffic are only a few of the interpretations that can be made from soil surveys to help determine the physical suitability of a site for recreation.

3. Resource Planning and Development - In addition to the interpretation of soil surveys and providing vegetative and water management information, USDA can provide park authorities and planning commissions assistance in planning land use, open spaces, conducting inventories of existing recreation areas and facilities, and making appraisals of the potentials for various recreation developments suitable in the area.

4. Project Activities - Many of the PL-566 watersheds, resource conservation and development projects, and rural renewal projects provide for both public and private recreational developments which supplement and complement the recreation facilities already available in the community.

5. Income-Producing Recreation - Individual recreation enterprises and recreation complexes developed as private business to serve the additional recreation needs of the public also supplement and complement public facilities. They provide for additional recreational opportunities such as shooting preserves, hunting and fishing, vacation farms, dude ranches, hiking and riding trails, boating, swimming, skiing and other winter sports, golfing, vacation cabins, cottages, and homes, as well as additional camping and picnic areas.

Working together, we can avoid piecemeal recreational developments and deterioration of our environment. We have the technical know-how in the various agencies and organizations involved. Our challenge is to harness available facilities and move ahead. We must use what we know.

You are involved in a most important work. You are saving and building an environment fit for man. I hope that the Department I represent can be of increasing help to you in this most important task.