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Recreation

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON

May 26, 1925

Mr. Ovid M. Butler, Secretary,
American Forestry Association,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Butler:

Your letter of May 18 is received.

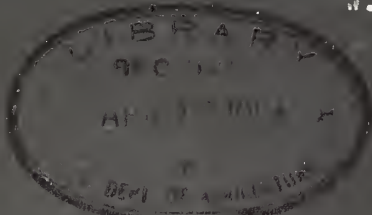
The recreational use of the National Forests is a subject of considerable interest to me, which I have discussed in some detail with the Forester, Colonel Greeley, but, unfortunately, I have been unable to give it the careful study which should precede my specific approval of principles or rules to govern it, nor will I be able to do so until after I return from my western trip. My general views on the subject, however, are known to the Forester and I understand that a statement which he has in preparation is in substantial accord with those views.

In my consideration of this subject the points which stand out prominently are these: The National Forests purely as a by-product of their systematic management and without impairment of their primary functions are making an enormously important contribution to public welfare and social progress; that this result is being secured not in conflict but in harmony with the intent of Congress; that notwithstanding the large degree of free use which is allowed, recreation in the National Forests is more than paying the costs of its supervision; and that the many people who know and use the National Forests are well satisfied with the present state of affairs. These facts lead inevitably to the conclusion that the Department's present policy is fundamentally sound and probably not in need of material modification.

Very sincerely yours,

W. M. Jardine.

Secretary.



87015

OUTDOOR RECREATION ON THE NATIONAL FORESTS

May, 1925

E. A. Sherman, Associate Forester,
Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture

Americans turn naturally to the mountains and the woods for their outdoor recreation. If the woods and mountains are close to well-populated districts it is inevitable that the citizens of the neighborhood will use them as camping grounds and for hunting, fishing, tramping and other forms of life in the open for which they offer opportunities. It is for this reason that the National Forests have been used for recreation in addition to the main purposes of timber production and watershed protection. Before the National Forests were thought of the people of the surrounding country used these areas, so far as conditions permitted, for recreation; after the establishment of the Forests they simply continued this use and expanded it with the growth of population and the increased accessibility of the areas. The Forest Service did not create the idea of recreational use of the National Forests; rather the public came in of its own accord, each year in increasing numbers, and the Forest Service recognizing that recreation was a resource, like timber and water, used its best efforts to see that it was so handled as to make the greatest returns to the national welfare consistent with the chief purposes for which the Forests were established.

The National Forests embrace parts of every mountain system and almost every forest region in the United States; they form the natural outlets of large populations, to which they are the logical, near-by, economically enjoyed fields for outdoor sport and recreation. To millions of people the National Forests are the natural and sometimes the only available playgrounds, other than their city parks. It is most vital to them that these areas should remain open for recreational purposes; but in this day of motors and good roads even the citizens of regions remote from the National Forests have a direct personal interest in recreation grounds where they can feel free to camp and enjoy themselves in their own way; so long as they obey the rules of good citizenship and good sportsmanship while in the woods.

A Question Has Been Raised

The natural and inevitable increase in the recreational use of the National Forests has recently brought into question how far this use should be permitted to develop. Is such a use a legitimate one, compatible with the purposes for which the Forests were created? Is the expenditure by the Forest Service of official time and public funds in the development of the recreational resources of the National Forests and in the supervision of their use by the public a legitimate expenditure? Those who have raised the questions have, to all intents and purposes, given

them negative answers. To the citizen, however, especially to the citizen who has visited the National Forests, the natural effect of the questions is surprise that they should ever have been raised. Why not? Forestry means trees; watershed protection means well vegetated soils, gently flowing streams; these mean natural beauty, salubrious climatic conditions, more abundant fish and game, increased opportunity for wholesome outdoor play for both old and young. What disadvantage is there in allowing the people of the United States the fullest and freest opportunity to realize upon these by-products of National Forest management, if they are careful with fire, refrain from polluting the streams, and do not interfere with the legitimate use of the material products of the Forest Land? Why isn't it a function of the Federal Government to make all of the properties under its control contribute in all constructive ways to the moral and physical growth and general well being of its citizens? Why shouldn't public funds be applied in some small degree to permit the development of supplemental forms of public-land use which will help the American people to counteract the stress and intensity of modern civilization, especially when a larger return can be obtained for less money than in any other way?

Character of the National Forests.

A decision on an issue like this requires facts, and a lot of them. It requires study and a lot of it. It requires intelligent understanding of a wide variety of natural conditions and of human needs. It is too vital a matter to be disposed of by snap judgment or in the light of partisan sympathies.

Now, what are the facts? To begin with, there are more than 150 National Forests; they contain a lot of land, 157 million acres; they are distributed from the Canadian border to the Mexican border, from Maine to California.

By far the greater part of the National Forests were created from the public domain. They represent the residue of the great forest wealth once in public ownership; the most rugged and least accessible bodies of timberland which, through the greater difficulties of exploitation, had been least attractive to the private appropriator. They therefore consist, to a certain minor degree, of great peaks and ridges rearing above timber line; rugged canyons; tumbling streams and waterfalls; steep slopes; blank areas of little or no timber value; all interspersed among the valuable timber-bearing lands. Such areas cannot, as a rule, be eliminated from the National Forests without leaving the Forests a patchwork of complicated boundaries, uncoordinated units, and conflicting jurisdictions, difficult and expensive of administration. There is no reason why such lands should be eliminated, as their important public values can best be realized under public management and they can be publicly administered as parts of the National Forests much more effectively and at much less



expense than in any other way. Then, too, they contain, or interlock with, important economic resources which inevitably will in time prove indispensable to the industrial growth of the nation and, therefore, deserve an economic form of management. There seems to be no reason why separate organizations should, on limited areas within the National Forests, discharge at considerable public expense administrative functions which the Forest Service can just as efficiently discharge at much less expense and with much less interference with administrative and economic processes.

Effect of Roads and Trails

The factor which in recent years has done most to increase the use of the National Forests for outdoor recreation is the extension of the public highway system under the Acts of Congress approved March 4, 1913, July 11, 1916, February 28, 1919, and November 1, 1921. Through the instrumentality of these Acts the National Forest areas, which previously had stood as partial barriers to free trans-State movement, have been made much more accessible to the motorist. The roads were not built to promote recreational use, but on the contrary were designed to fill in the gaps in the State and county systems of public highways. Their purpose was and is to promote the free movement of people and commodities, to facilitate the use of the raw materials produced by National Forest lands, and to permit the better protection of the public properties. The fact that these roads give access to areas of recreational value is an incidental result rather than a primary purpose in the projection and construction of the road system. Coincident with the extension of National Forest roads and trails there has been a corresponding growth in the use of automobiles for outdoor recreation and in the amount of leisure time available for that purpose.

The increased use of the National Forests for outdoor recreation during the past eight years is well illustrated by the following statistics:

Years	Estimated number of summer visitors including travelers over Forest roads	Total number of cabins and residences	Total number of hotels, resorts and camps
1917	3,160,300	3,269	359
1918	3,322,565	3,646	460
1919	3,964,344	3,987	395
1920	4,832,671	4,638	410
1921	5,453,420	6,168	529
1922	6,172,942	6,421	629
1923	10,543,893	7,394	719
1924	11,394,366	8,349	724



An important feature has been the development of recreational

Development to Meet Demands of the Public

As recreational use increased in volume the Forest Service initiated certain constructive activities not so much to promote recreation as to protect public property and public health. In order to concentrate the people upon areas of least hazard from the standpoint of fire and sanitation, camp grounds were set aside and partially developed. Summer home communities were encouraged and progress was made in plans to care for the increasing numbers of people who resorted to the Forests for recreation. Provision was made for public service utilities, especially the simple, inexpensive, outdoor camps conducted under municipal, semi-civic or private auspices; the little resorts, the stores, garages, stables and other facilities so essential to modern comfort even in the wilderness. Every form of land use which contributes to public convenience and is not inconsistent with the primary purposes of the Forests is recognized and provided for. In awarding such privileges the laws of business competition are allowed full operation. There are no arbitrarily established limitations.

The Forest Service has now recognized approximately 1500 small areas as National Forest camp grounds, for the free accomodation of the traveling public, and upon these camp grounds is installing the simple improvements necessary for the protection of public health and public property. The structures and other improvements constructed by the Forest Service for the convenience and safety of its summer visitors hardly justify any charge of extravagance. They are simple; almost primitive. Some small amount of clearing; toilets; fireplaces; sources of water supply; in some cases inexpensive tables and benches combined; in others, simple booths wherein maps and information material may be placed; in still others, but rarely, inexpensive shelters. The only thing to be said against these improvements is that there is not enough of them. There should be more of them, for they are cheap insurance against both fire and disease, besides adding greatly to playground value of the public properties.

At the close of 1924 the total value of all recreational improvements constructed by the Forest Service was \$131,472.00. This sum includes all direct expenditures by the Forest Service, the contributed labor of Forest officers, the value of labor, materials, and cash received from cooperators, and the value of improvements acquired without cost to the Forest Service. The cooperative contributions amounted to \$27,644.00, consequently the net cost to the United States for all of the work done has been \$103,828.00. These figures do not, however, include the costs of repairs and maintenance. During 1924 those costs amounted to \$5,203.00. In earlier years, when there were fewer improvements, less need for repairs and lower salaries, the maintenance costs were considerably less. Considering the millions of people to whom these facilities have been of service their cost will hardly seem excessive.



Community Camps

An important feature has been the development of recreational communities or areas within which appropriate provision can be made for the construction and operation of county, municipal, semi-civic, and private outdoor camps and resorts, individual summer homes, and the various forms of commercial utilities required to meet the needs of the summer population. These areas are systematically surveyed, mapped, and classified, after which their occupancy is allowed under special-use permits, for which in all cases, except those of a public character, rentals are paid.

One might, perhaps, jump to the conclusion that the management of such communities would make heavy demands on the time and funds of the Forest Service, but, in fact, the reverse is true. The National Forest regulations afford the dwellers in such communities abundant means for self-government and many of the communities make and to a large extent enforce the rules and improvement plans essential to their comfort, convenience and safety; the local Forest officers transacting much of their official business with the Advisory Committees selected by the permittees. This simplifies administration and, more important still, minimizes the need for official supervision or control.

Free Use Consistent with American Ideals

No charge is made for permission to use the National Forest highways, trails, camp grounds, or lands except where exclusive rights or special privileges are desired and these are allowed only where they do not interfere with free use of the Forest by the general public. People use the Forests without restriction or restraint, except where it is necessary to require that camp fire permits be secured, free of charge or, in rare instances of great emergency, to restrict people to designated camp grounds or to exclude them from areas of exceptional fire danger. Ordinarily each visitor has unrestricted opportunity to follow his own bent. If he prefers to camp at some isolated point rather than to patronize an established camp ground he is at liberty to do so. The only requirements imposed upon him are care with fire and conformity to reasonable sanitary rules. As a result recreation in the National Forests is democratic, informal, and largely unrestricted. In the National Forests monopolies are not allowed but, on the contrary, competition in serving the public prevails.

As a matter of fact, this policy of free use is consistent with the general practices of Federal, State and municipal governments. For example, the supervision of navigable water bodies entails heavy public expenditures but nobody thinks of charging for the privilege of boating or bathing in such waters, which, by the way, have the same relation to the recreation needs of some of our citizens that the National Forests

have to others. In the municipal parks, the privileges of riding, or walking through, of picnicking on the grass, of looking at the animals in the zoo, of transporting people for hire, are almost invariably allowed without charge. Only the special privileges and forms of use, which involve the exclusion of the general public, are charged for. This same principle prevails in the National Forests.

The fact that the majority of recreational uses are allowed without charge does not mean, however, that this form of service is not self-sustaining. It more than pays its way.

The revenues for the fiscal year 1924 which were derived from special-use permits amounted to \$207,636.98, of which by far the greater portion represents recreational uses. During the same fiscal year the expenditures for the construction of sanitary and fire protective improvements upon camp grounds amounted to \$18,425; those for the protection of fish and game to \$50,263; and those for the administration of land uses other than timber-sale and grazing to \$113,185. This latter figure is by no means all chargeable to recreation, but if the full amount is debited the total expenditures for all activities contributing to recreation and game conservation in the Forests aggregated only \$181,869. Notwithstanding the large degree of free use allowed, the revenues from recreational use exceed the expenditures for such uses.

Congressional Approval

It has been intimated that extensive public use of the National Forests is contrary to the wishes of Congress. That is not so. In the few cases in which it has expressed itself, the attitude of Congress toward recreational use of the National Forests has been favorable. The Organic Act of June 4, 1897, provides, in part, as follows:

"Nor shall anything herein prohibit any person from entering upon such Forest Reservations for all proper and lawful purposes, including that of prospecting, locating, and developing the mineral resources thereof; Provided, That such persons comply with the rules and regulations covering such Forest Reservations."

The right of the Secretary of Agriculture to administer National Monuments embracing land under his jurisdiction is clearly established by the Act of June 8, 1906. The Act of March 4, 1915, authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to issue for periods not exceeding thirty years permits to responsible persons or associations to use and occupy suitable spaces or portions of ground in the National Forests for the construction of summer homes, hotels, stores, or other structures needed for recreation or public convenience. The Agricultural Appropriation Bills for the

fiscal years 1923, 1924, 1925, and 1926, contain appropriations of \$10,000, \$15,000, \$25,000, and \$25,000, respectively, for the construction of sanitary and fire improvements upon public camp grounds within the National Forests.

Guiding Principles in the Recreational Use of National Forests

Unless some radical change is made in National Forest policies which will discourage or restrict recreational use, it is probable that the use of Forest highways, trails and camp grounds by the recreation-seeking public will progressively increase. There will be appreciable increases in the numbers of outdoor camps maintained on National Forest lands by counties, municipalities, and other political units, and by semi-official or unofficial agencies. The numbers of summer homes maintained under special-use permit will mount progressively from the present total of 8,349 to several times that number. Private capital and initiative engaged in supplying the outdoor recreational needs of the American public will turn to the National Forest fields of operation and will encourage and develop many forms of outdoor sport under National Forest conditions which are now of minor consequences. The present question is whether this growth should or should not be allowed. It can be taken care of without any serious impairment of or interference with the primary functions of the National Forests, and the question is purely one of Departmental policy or organization.

Recreational use is not inconsistent with forest management, but to the contrary as a common by-product of such management. In the public and private forests of other countries, with long-established systems of forest management, public use for recreation is thoroughly recognized as an important form of land service. In this country, where the inclusion within forest units of small areas clearly most valuable for recreation is unavoidable, and where economic and industrial needs ultimately will require coordinated use of every available resource, the correlation of recreation with forest management is even more desirable and necessary than elsewhere. In view of this the logical, the inevitable conclusion is that one of the proper functions of the National Forests is to afford the people of the United States opportunity for outdoor recreation; that one of the proper functions of the Forest Service is to administer the recreational use of the National Forests in proper coordination with other forms of use; that the expenditure of Department of Agriculture appropriations in the development of recreational facilities on the National Forests, to the fullest extent authorized by Congress and compatible with other public needs, is a proper use of such appropriations.

In considering the question, the people of the United States will want to know how the Department of Agriculture will be guided in its future treatment of the subject. In categorical detail, the principles

the Forest Service will submit to the Secretary for approval are as follows:

1. The recognition of recreational use as a form of National Forest land service of great public value and importance, which shall be systematically coordinated with other forms of land use such as timber production, streamflow protection, and forage production.

2. The recognition of recreation management within the National Forests as a function of the Forest Service, which in discharging that function may apply to areas of recreational value the methods required for their best development, to the extent compatible with other National Forest requirements and within the limits set by Congress.

3. The retention under National Forest management of all areas of recreational value, except where Congress considers that that value so completely transcends all others and is of such public importance as to require a separate and specialized management.

4. The systematic extension of recreation plans to all areas of National Forest land possessing recreational value.

5. The continuation of present plans for the establishment upon National Forest lands of county, municipal, semi-public and private outdoor camps, sanitoria, schools, resorts, hotels, etc.

6. The encouragement of simple, inexpensive forms of mass recreation, including the extension and improvement of public camp grounds upon National Forest land.

7. The continuation of the present policy of making no charge for recreational use of the National Forests except where the land is used for commercial purposes or exclusive use of specific tracts or other special privileges are granted.

8. The continuation of the policy authorized by Congress of issuing permits for individual summer homes or cabins where they will not interfere with more general forms of public recreation.

9. The encouragement, through equitable permit provisions, reasonable rental charges, and minimum restrictions, of the establishment upon Forest lands of the various utilities or forms of service needed for the convenience of the public.

10. The regulation of recreational use of National Forest lands to, but only to, the extent necessary to protect public health and property, to secure reasonably full development and utilization of recreational resources, and to avoid undue conflict with other uses of the Forests.

