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The Policy Path to the Great Outdoors

A History of the Outdoor Recreation Review Commissions

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Abstract

Since the end of World War II, recreation has become increasingly important socially and economically in the United States, so much so that it became a focus of federal policy beginning in 1958. Since that time, two national commissions, the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission and the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors, were established to bring to the president and the Congress findings and recommendations on the nation's policies to ensure continued availability of recreation opportunities for America. Now, twenty years since the last review, there is interest in addressing anew the policy initiatives needed at this time. This paper provides an overview of the two Commissions and outlines some considerations to address today.

Key Words: recreation policy, Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission, President's Commission on Americans Outdoors, Land and Water Conservation Fund, federal lands, outdoor recreation, and state recreation planning

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George H. Siehl*

Introduction

In the latter half of the twentieth century, two significant national reviews of outdoor recreation in America have encompassed the available land and water resources, the programs for their management, the policies intended to guide the availability and use of the public recreation resources and programs, and the activities that Americans have enjoyed using the available resources. The first review was a legislatively established effort, the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC), which operated from 1958 to 1962. The second review, the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors, was established by presidential executive order some 20 years later and operated for 16 months between late 1985 and early 1987.

In this paper, I summarize the circumstances surrounding the establishment of these two commissions, their modes of operation, conclusions and recommendations, and their legacy. I also argue that a new review, more than 20 years since the completion of the last, would be an appropriate exercise of resource and political stewardship at this time.

The Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission

Background and Organization

The years following World War II marked a great change in American society. The years of privation during the Great Depression and the scarcities of the war years came to an end and were replaced by jobs and goods that had been in short supply. College educations became available to millions of returning veterans under the GI Bill, available leisure time increased, and the population grew rapidly, marking the onset of the Baby Boomer generation. Americans turned to recreational pursuits both traditional and new—from picnicking to rafting in war

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surplus rubber rafts or skiing on surplus ski equipment. Attendance at national and state parks and other public recreation facilities boomed as an increasingly mobile population hit the road seeking enjoyment in the outdoors.

Congress, state officials, and conservation leaders recognized these trends—as well as the significant pressure from competing land uses and budget priorities and their effects on the supply of recreation resources. Thus, in 1958, Congress enacted Public Law (P.L.) 85–470, establishing the ORRRC, with a three-part charge: to determine outdoor recreation wants and needs expected in the years 1976 and 2000; to determine the recreation resources expected to be available to meet those demands; and to determine the policies and programs that would meet the present and future outdoor recreation needs.

To this end, the ORRRC was authorized to consist of two members of each party from the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, to be appointed by the speaker of the House, and two senators from each party from the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, to be appointed by the president of the Senate. The president of the United States was to appoint seven citizens knowledgeable about recreation and resources, one of whom the president would designate as chairman.

The law authorized a staff for the ORRRC, the appointment of liaison officers from pertinent departments or agencies, and a 25-person advisory council to provide representation of a broad range of interests (19 are named), including state and local agencies, nongovernmental groups, commercial interests, and institutions concerned with water development and pollution control, as well as education groups, labor groups, and public utilities.

The law required the establishment of an “inventory and evaluation of outdoor recreation resources and opportunities [drawing] to the fullest extent possible” on existing work from federal, state, and other sources. The ORRRC was also expected to examine trend data and information concerning “population, leisure, transportation, and other factors” as they related to the inventory. From the evaluation of this information, the ORRRC was to make its determinations concerning future recreation needs and recommended policies and programs.

To gather the information, the ORRRC was authorized to conduct public hearings or otherwise gather opinions. It was also authorized to make grants to state and federal agencies to carry out aspects of the study and to contract with public or private organizations for this purpose.

Laurance S. Rockefeller was appointed chairman of the ORRRC by President Eisenhower. Staff was selected in the fall of 1958 when the ORRRC began the work that

culminated in the submission of its report, *Outdoor Recreation for America*, to President Kennedy in January 1962.

The Results of the ORRRC Process

The ORRRC was notable for its bipartisanship and its comprehensiveness. The political party representation of the congressional appointees to the Commission was balanced. Further, the ORRRC was initiated under the Republican President Eisenhower and was completed, and its recommendations implemented, under the Democratic President Kennedy. Similarly, the breadth of the task assigned to the ORRRC and the detailed listing of elements and interests to be considered and consulted was novel for its time. This early outreach may have facilitated the later enactment of the ORRRC's recommendations.

The ORRRC's report highlighted some of its findings, as follows:

- The simple activities (e.g., walking for pleasure or exercise and picnicking) are the most popular.
- Outdoor opportunities are most needed near metropolitan areas.
- Across the country, considerable land is now available for outdoor recreation, but it does not effectively meet existing needs.
- Funding is needed for land acquisition, rehabilitation of older recreation facilities, and construction of new facilities (e.g., trails, ball fields, and pools).
- Outdoor recreation is often compatible with other resource uses, such as management for wildlife and watersheds or, in some cases, historic preservation, timber harvesting, or hunting.
- Water is a focal point of outdoor recreation.
- Outdoor recreation brings about economic benefits.
- Outdoor recreation is a major leisure time activity and is growing in importance.
- More information is needed about the value of outdoor recreation.

The report made over 30 specific recommendations for providing and managing outdoor recreation resources sufficient to meet anticipated public demands. These recommendations included a draft national outdoor recreation policy outlining the roles of the state and federal governments as well as a system for classifying outdoor recreation resources into six classes according to specific public uses, ranging from high-density recreation areas (Class I) to historic and cultural sites (Class VI).

Another category of recommendations suggested, among other things, actions by which state and local governments could increase recreation considerations in their planning efforts, including efforts to enhance water-based recreation opportunities. Other recommendations called

for continuing federal assistance to urban areas for the protection of open space and initiating the transfer of the surface rights of surplus federal lands to localities for recreation use, with reversion clauses. Important federal recommendations included the congressional establishment of wilderness areas and the protection of certain rivers in their free-flowing state.

The ORRRC included six recommendations to enhance recreation values through their incorporation in related programs, such as pollution control, floodplain zoning, and agricultural programs.

Nine recommendations addressed the need for increased funds to enhance recreation opportunities. These included suggestions for state and local bond issues for recreation, user fees, and increased reliance on the private sector to provide recreation opportunities commercially or as concessionaires on public recreation lands.

The ORRRC recommended the establishment of a Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in the Department of the Interior to bring coordination to federal outdoor recreation activities. The new bureau was also seen as assisting “State and local governments with technical aid in planning and administration” and helping to develop various administrative and operational standards. The ORRRC envisioned that this bureau would serve as an information clearinghouse. In addition, the ORRRC recommended that the bureau encourage interstate and regional cooperation via state and local recreation projects tied directly to federal lands—such as national parks, national forests, or wildlife refuges—to multiply the public recreation benefit or enhance the resource management purpose of the separate agencies.

Perhaps most importantly, the ORRRC deemed that this bureau should establish and administer a federal grants-in-aid program to facilitate the growth of recreation opportunities by assisting states in planning, acquiring, and developing new facilities (e.g., picnic tables, tennis courts, and trails). The size of the grants would be determined by such factors as “the State population, area, needs, and the amount of Federal land and Federal recreation programs in the State and region.” Funded proposals would have to be included in a statewide recreation plan.

The ORRRC further recommended the creation of an interagency Recreation Advisory Council “to assure that recreation policy and planning receive attention at a high level and to promote interdepartmental coordination.” The secretaries of Interior, Agriculture, and Defense would be designated members, with the former serving as chair. Other departments could be included on an ad hoc basis “when matters affecting their interests are under consideration by the Council.”

Follow-Through

The report and recommendations were received enthusiastically by the Kennedy administration and by Congress. Through P.L. 88–29, Congress directed the Interior Secretary to “formulate and maintain a comprehensive nationwide outdoor recreation plan,” the first of which was to be submitted to the president for transmittal to Congress within five years. The first plan, *The Recreation Imperative*, was prepared and ready to be sent to Congress, but the administration found it too ambitious and costly and withheld it. A second version of the plan, *Outdoor Recreation: A Legacy for America*, was sent to the president and Congress in 1973.

Senator Henry Jackson, an ORRRC member and later chair of the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, resurrected and published the long-overdue original draft nationwide outdoor recreation plan as a September 1974 Committee Print, entitled *The Recreation Imperative: A Draft of the Nationwide Outdoor Recreation Plan*:

In response to those recommendations [of the ORRRC], President Kennedy in his March 1, 1962 Presidential Message on Conservation announced that a Bureau of Outdoor Recreation would be established in the Department of the Interior. Congress by the act of May 28, 1963 (Public Law 88–29 ...), set forth the principal duties which were delegated to the new Bureau.

The third and final plan issued was *The Third Nationwide Outdoor Recreation Plan*, put forth in 1979 by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, the renamed Bureau of Outdoor Recreation.

The authorities of the new Bureau of Outdoor Recreation were largely as envisioned by the ORRRC report. P.L. 88–29 assigned the responsibilities to the secretary of the Interior who, in turn, delegated them to the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, which he established administratively.

Congress enacted other ORRRC recommendations during the remainder of the 1960s, with the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (P.L. 88–578) and the Wilderness Act (P.L. 88–577) passed and signed into law in 1964, and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (P.L. 90–542) and the National Trails Act (P.L. 90–543) following in 1968. Meanwhile, states organized their efforts and began preparing comprehensive outdoor recreation plans to become eligible to share in the new federal recreation grants.

The ORRRC stimulated considerable research on recreation during its existence. Its report was published with 27 volumes of research, referred to as the ORRRC Study Reports,

produced by ORRRC staff, public agencies, universities, nonprofit research organizations, and other sources. Research on recreation has continued unabated in academic and, to a more limited degree, agency settings.

Another important action that followed the completion of the ORRRC review of recreation policy, programs, and management was the establishment of a congressionally authorized body, the Public Land Law Review Commission (PLLRC), to conduct a detailed assessment of the lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management. The PLLRC included the matter of recreation on these lands in its broad review of public land concerns. The PLLRC was authorized by P.L. 88-606 in 1964 and, in 1970, submitted its report, *One Third of the Nation's Land*, to Congress. In this report and in contract reports prepared on its behalf, the PLLRC included some discussion of recreation.

The President's Commission on Americans Outdoors

Introduction

The impetus provided by the ORRRC continued for the better part of two decades as Congress expanded the federal recreation estate acreage and diversity through the addition of new areas, such as seashores, recreation areas, trails, protected river corridors, and historic corridors. The National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service also upgraded and expanded their visitor facilities.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was frequently amended in the 1980s but continued to support many of these federal expansions, as well as state and local recreation planning and facility expansion. The matters at issue with respect to the LWCF during this period included the source of funding to operate the program, the manner in which funds should be allocated between federal conservation agencies and the states, and whether indoor recreation facilities (enclosed swimming pools or tennis courts, for instance) should be financed under the grants to states. One important, lasting decision was to use the money generated from federal offshore oil and gas leasing as a source of funds for the LWCF. (This may become problematic now as Congress alters the offshore leasing program by giving states more influence on leasing decisions and altering the revenue-sharing formula with coastal states.)

Bureau of Outdoor Recreation technical assistance and research programs grew during this time, although interagency coordination was limited because of the bureau's lower ranking

on the organizational chart, particularly when dealing with other departments, such as Agriculture and Defense.

Recreation is dynamic: emerging interests appear frequently and are sometimes ephemeral and sometimes long lived. Government programs also change, sometimes showing long-term patterns of growth or decay. By the 1980s, such dynamics were evident with regard to outdoor recreation. Funding from the LWCF had peaked in 1978, concurrent with the last of the Baby Boomers reaching their teen years, primed for recreation.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, recreation was increasingly prodded—or driven—by technology with the development of improved recreation equipment and clothing and the appearance of hang gliders and motorized outdoor recreation toys, such as snowmobiles and wheeled off-road vehicles. A change in recreation venue also took place, with many choosing to pursue typically outdoor activities—such as running, swimming, skating, and tennis—indoors. Congress generally resisted efforts to allow state use of LWCF monies to build such covered facilities.

The 1970s gave America its first taste of limited gasoline supplies since WWII with the Arab oil embargo. Consequently, higher fuel bills became a factor in recreation and vacation travel.

Federal spending on recreation became more limited, and the condition of federal facilities declined. Pressure from advocates of federal programs led Congress to allocate more LWCF funding to federal use and less to the states.

Other losses included the open space grant program administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. In addition, the Recreation Advisory Council underwent a series of name changes and reorganizations only to disappear into the newly established Council on Environmental Quality.

Steps toward a New Overview

The presidential election of 1980 provided an opportunity for natural resources groups to bring a new agenda for resource management to the attention of the new Reagan administration. Some two dozen conservation and commodity organizations, under the lead sponsorship of the American Forestry Association, participated in a National Conference on Renewable Natural Resources, held from November 30 to December 3, 1980, in Washington, DC. Professor Carl Reidel of the University of Vermont served as conference chairman.

In the final conference report, *Renewable Natural Resources: Key to the Future*, the recreation panel of the conference, having noted the adverse trends affecting outdoor recreation, developed the following recommendation:

A commission of Congress should be formed to conduct a high-level review of supply and demand for outdoor recreation. The commission should be comprised of key legislators, executive-branch personnel, state and local government representatives, and private entrepreneur recreationists. The commission's objective should be to clarify policy issues and to identify legislative needs.

The new administration appeared to be no friend of recreation when its Interior secretary, James Watt, administratively terminated the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (which had been renamed the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service under a previous administration). The secretary was opposed to large-scale federal acquisition of additional lands.

Senator Malcolm Wallop, new chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands and Reserved Water, worked with the Division of Environment and Natural Resources Policy of the Congressional Research Service (CRS) to develop a technique for reviewing the issues associated with protecting land in a fiscally constrained period. What developed was known as the "Wallop Workshops," a series of hearings in 1981 and 1982 that brought together a number of leaders and innovators in land protection efforts, many at the state and local level. The workshops, held in the Interior Committee Room, were chaired, not by senators, but by the heads of three conservation organizations: Emery Castle of Resources for the Future, Patrick Noonan of the Conservation Resources Group, and William Reilly of the Conservation Foundation. Senators participated as questioners and commenters, and members of the audience were free to raise questions or make comments after the invited panelists finished their presentations.

Following the second hearing, the workshop chairs and organizer were invited to lunch with Secretary Watt to discuss follow-up actions to the workshops. At that lunch, the chairs proposed the creation of a new ORRRC to review the full spectrum of recreation concerns. Although initially opposed, Secretary Watt eventually relented and agreed that such a new assessment might have utility. This meeting led to the next step on the path to a new recreation commission, a review group convened by Laurance S. Rockefeller, chair of the original ORRRC.

Chaired by Henry L. Diamond, editor of the ORRRC report, the Policy Review Group brought together the three chairs from the Wallop Workshops—Castle, Noonan, and Reilly. They were joined by Sheldon Coleman, founder of the Coleman Corporation, William Penn Mott, president of the California State Parks Foundation, and Mr. Rockefeller, who served in an ex officio capacity.

The Policy Review Group met from August 1982 until February 1983, when it issued its report *Outdoor Recreation for America*. The authors noted that their report “was not an in-depth study, but a careful review” by the experienced members of the group. As sources, the group used commissioned papers and presentations by leading recreation authorities as well as extended discussions within the group. From its review of these sources, and in consideration of the many changes that had occurred since the 1962 ORRRC report, the Policy Review Group concluded that outdoor recreation was perhaps even more important than in 1962. However, “outdoor recreation policy is on hold, and governments at all levels are doing less than they were and problems are not being effectively addressed.”

The eight findings of the group reflect the changes they encountered:

- The two decades since the ORRRC have been a period of great social and economic change.
- Changes in how and where we live, work, and play have had a profound effect on outdoor recreation.
- 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.
- Governments in general are doing less for outdoor recreation than is required to meet the need.
- The role of the federal government needs to be reassessed, redefined, and revived.
- The private sector is providing more outdoor recreation than it did 20 years ago; it could do even more with government cooperation.
- Outdoor recreation could be provided in ways that meet increased demands without requiring considerable public expense.
- Outdoor recreation planning and management must be based on improved information.

These findings led the Policy Review Group to recommend that Congress create a new ORRRC. They noted that, despite the many changes they found, “the ORRRC model of a bipartisan group in which congressional leaders joined with informed citizens is as sound and appropriate today as it was” when congressional leaders endorsed the idea in 1958.

The Legislative Step

Armed with this prestigious endorsement of an action they supported, a number of recreation interest groups approached Congress seeking legislative authorization of a new ORRRC. Senator Wallop and 27 cosponsors introduced S. 1090 on April 19, 1983, and

Representative Morris Udall and 2 cosponsors introduced a companion bill, H.R. 2837, on April 28, 1983. These measures would have created a new commission based on the model of the 1958 group.

In the Senate, the bill was jointly referred to the Committee on Governmental Affairs (because of the relationship to state and local government interests) and to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. This caused a delay, which conflicted with Senator Wallop's desire to move the bill quickly, but caused no long-term damage.

In the Governmental Affairs hearing on June 28, 1983, all witnesses supported the proposal, but offered suggestions for improving the measure. The committee modified the bill to incorporate some of these suggestions, increasing the commission's size from 15 to 21 persons by allowing House and Senate leaders each to pick three private citizens in addition to the members from their respective chambers. The committee also added research and academic institutions with special knowledge of leisure, recreation, natural resources, and the environment to the interests to be represented on the advisory council.

Senator Wallop held hearings before his subcommittee on September 23, 1983, and again, all witnesses supported the measure, albeit with some suggestions for changes. The bill was favorably reported on November 4, 1983, with some additional amendments, including language emphasizing that the commission was to be primarily concerned with "outdoor" recreation in "urban or non-urban areas." In addition, the president pro tempore of the Senate, rather than the president, was designated as the individual to name the senators to serve on the commission and the three Senate-designated private members, with the advice of the majority leader. The bill passed the Senate by unanimous consent on November 18, 1983, and was sent to the House and referred to the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs.

The quick, favorable, bipartisan consideration came to an end before the Subcommittee on Public Lands and National Parks, despite the cosponsorship of Representative Udall's H.R. 2837 by more than 100 House members. The Subcommittee held hearings on April 12 and 26, 1984, for administration and public witnesses. On August 22, a hearing was held for governors or their representatives. Again, support for the measure was broad, with suggestions for additional amendments. However, the Subcommittee took no further action and the measure died in the 98th Congress. The Subcommittee chairman, addressing a conservation luncheon group months later, was asked why the bill was allowed to die. He responded that he had no intention of allowing President Reagan a Rose Garden signing opportunity that might make him look good before the election. In addition, national environmental groups that were hostile to the Reagan

administration may have urged the Subcommittee chairman to thwart the legislation because they feared what might come from a new commission with a perspective on resource management that might be broader than their own.

President Reagan revitalized the issue on January 28, 1985, when he signed Executive Order 12503, establishing a Presidential Commission on Outdoor Recreation Resources Review. The commission would consist of 15 members, all appointed by the president, and would have one year to complete its work. Otherwise, the executive order largely paralleled the original Senate legislation, with the addition of cautionary language noting the expectation of recommendations “consistent with the need for fiscal economy,” and that the commission should “assess the budgetary and regulatory cost increases or cost savings of its proposals.”

A change of Interior secretaries from William Clark to Donald Hodel delayed the selection and screening of candidate commission members for the President’s consideration. The lost time was added back to the commission’s operating timeframe. Thus, the last step had been taken in creating a new outdoor recreation oversight commission. The 1985 version of an outdoor recreation commission was about to take the stage.

The Second Commission

President Reagan chose Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander to chair the new commission; for vice chairman, he chose Gilbert Grosvenor, President of the National Geographic Society. Chairman Alexander chose to rename the body the President’s Commission on Americans Outdoors (hereafter, PCAO).

Congressional members included Senators Malcolm Wallop and J. Bennett Johnston and Representatives Morris Udall and Barbara Vucanovich. PCAO members working in state and local government included Mayor Frank Bogert of Palm Springs, California; Charles Jordan, parks director of Austin, Texas; and Dr. Wilbur LaPage, director, New Hampshire Division of Parks and Recreation. Those with recreation industry affiliations included Sheldon Coleman, chairman of the Board, The Coleman Company; Rex G. Maughan, chairman of the Conference of National Park Concessioners; and Stuart J. Northrop, chairman of the Executive Committee, The Huff Corporation. Conservation and recreation organizations were represented by Derrick Crandall, president, American Recreation Coalition; Patrick F. Noonan, president, The Conservation Fund; and Sally A.G. Ranney, president, American Wilderness Alliance.

The PCAO was supported by a professional staff that was supplemented by federal natural resources agency personnel who contributed additional time and effort to assist the commission and staff. In addition, 20 senior advisors were named and made their expertise available to the PCAO by reviewing and providing comments on draft papers.

The PCAO held its organizational meeting in September 1985, and established three working committees: Supply, Demand, and New Ideas. One commissioner headed each working committee. Staff was selected in the following months, with the second commission meeting held in Austin, Texas, in December 1985. At this meeting, commissioners approved a three-part work plan that envisioned three sequential phases of operation beginning with issue identification, followed by issue analysis, and leading to issue resolution, which would provide the basis for findings and recommendations.

Like the original ORRRC, the PCAO used research conducted by staff and outside participants; but unlike the ORRRC, the PCAO also conducted an extensive public outreach effort involving 18 public hearings and 11 strategic planning sessions around the country. The public at large was also invited to submit ideas for enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities for consideration by the PCAO. More than 700 papers were submitted in response to this invitation.

Chairman Alexander was able to enlist many of his fellow governors in establishing outdoor recreation commissions in their states or otherwise reviewing local recreation needs and opportunities. This multiplier effect greatly expanded the level of interest and involvement nationally in support of the Americans Outdoors initiative.

The findings of the PCAO, first indicated in a preliminary report, *Americans and the Outdoors*, largely reiterated many of the findings of the Policy Review Group: declining recreation efforts at all levels of government, limited financial resources, new forms of recreational activities, and an increased presence of the private sector in recreation. Other social and demographic facets of change were noted, such as an increase in the number of women in the workforce, an increase in single-parent households, and the growing use of three-day weekends, altering recreation demand. In addition, the PCAO found that continuing growth and development were impinging on existing or potential recreation areas. The liability crisis was found to limit outdoor recreation opportunities as the threat of lawsuits based on liability for injuries drove many recreation providers to limit the opportunities they made available.

The PCAO found that recreation opportunities close to home are most in demand. More distant sites retain considerable appeal, but busy schedules make it more difficult to use these remote locales. On a more positive note, the commission also found that Americans greatly value the outdoors, and it is important to them. In addition, outdoor recreation provides significant social, economic, and environmental benefits.

The PCAO's report, *Report and Recommendations to the President of the United States*, offers many specific recommendations aimed at federal, state, local, public, and private outdoor recreation interests. Perhaps most prominent among those nationwide in scope are the following:

- Communities should establish greenways—corridors of private and public recreation lands and waters—to provide people with access to open space close to where they live and to link together the rural and urban spaces in the American landscape.
- Community by community, across America, we should form coalitions for action. We must organize to invest in recreation opportunities for the future, and to protect our outdoors heritage.
- Private sector, government, and academic interests should work jointly to establish a National Recreation Accounts network to facilitate collection, analysis, and sharing of statistical data and information.
- Congress should authorize a private, nonprofit outdoors institution, to stimulate grassroots leadership and promote innovation and excellence.
- Congress and the executive branch should develop mechanisms to facilitate the discussion and planning of national outdoors policy, such as a congressional caucus and a presidential subcabinet council.
- The LWCF should be succeeded by a dedicated trust—providing a minimum of \$1 billion per year—to help pay for federal, state, and local land acquisition and state and local facility development and rehabilitation. Congress should consider creating an endowed trust that, over time, would be self-sustaining.

The Aftermath

The ending of the PCAO was as complex as its beginning. The federal interagency Task Force on Outdoor Recreation Resources and Opportunities was convened, chaired by a member of the Council on Environmental Quality, Ms. Jacqueline E. Schafer, to review the PCAO report. This review was submitted to the Domestic Policy Council to “prepare proposals for the President to further develop outdoor recreation opportunities.” The July 1988 report of the task force, *Outdoor Recreation in a Nation of Communities*, was based, in part, on the PCAO's emphasis on recreation close to home and community efforts to provide this amenity.

The task force report, in its executive summary, contains five principal proposals, most with a number of specific recommendations. The five proposals are to:

- Foster an outdoor recreation ethic for America's communities.
- Protect private property rights and relieve landowner liability.
- Develop an integrated outdoor recreation policy to improve cooperation and coordination among federal land-managing agencies.
- Encourage cooperative partnerships to expand recreation opportunities close to home.
- Improve environmental quality and outdoor recreation settings.

Another complicating issue involved a lawsuit filed by the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise, charging that the PCAO failed to follow the executive order that created it and the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). Further, Congress requested that the General Accounting Office (GAO; now the Government Accountability Office) investigate the Commission's compliance with FACA. The GAO report concluded that the Department of the Interior was noncompliant in ensuring that the Commission adhered to FACA requirements. However, the GAO report stated that, "our review of the Commission and Interior records show that, overall, they met FACA's requirements to disclose the nature and extent of the Commission's activities."

Legislatively, submission of the PCAO's report coincided with the political turnover of the Senate; as a result, the report was largely ignored by Congress in the further formulation of recreation policy. Thus, the second report experienced none of the legislative "legs" of its predecessor.

State and local governments did embrace the PCAO's work and recommendations, igniting the "prairie fire" of local action called for by Chairman Alexander. As a result, a number of new recreation and open space bond issues were floated and approved in the following years, new cooperative efforts were established between public and private recreation providers, and numerous outdoor recreation facilities were improved or initiated. Perhaps the most exciting on-the-ground implementation was the rapid appearance of the PCAO-recommended greenways.

Reassessing Recreation Anew

The year 2008 marks the 100th anniversary of the Conference of the Governors of the United States, convened by President Theodore Roosevelt to address the conservation of natural resources. Those conservation efforts of a century ago still form the basis of much of our

national recreation estate: forests, parks, streams, and open countryside. Although the circumstances of daily life have changed greatly over the past century, the importance of natural resource conservation remains as relevant today as then for recreation and for our national wellbeing. Therefore, this is an opportune time to reexamine outdoor recreation in the context of both the natural resource base and the changed social and technological conditions of a new century.

The current year (2008) also marks an interval of a half century since the start of the ORRRC, and slightly more than 20 years since the last national assessment of outdoor recreation by the PCAO. That commission, which followed the completion of the original ORRRC by about 20 years, found conditions marked by both continuity and by significant change over that period. The continuity found by the PCAO shows the continued public interest in and support for a federal role in recreation as well as continued, extensive participation in certain types of recreation activity. The change over two decades is important in that it may indicate the need to alter the breadth or emphasis of the federal role going forward. Given the rapidity of social and technological change, two decades may define a reasonable span over which it is appropriate to take a careful look at the new circumstances surrounding issues of demand and supply in outdoor recreation.

Certainly, the larger components of American society—demographics, economics, and politics, for instance—have changed and continue to change. Some of the important trends in these areas include the following.

Demographics

The population continues to grow, to age, and to become more diverse. Each of these changes carries implications for recreation. With more people, demand for recreation opportunities increases across the board. At the same time, more people consume more space for housing, commercial and industrial facilities, schools, and other infrastructure, reducing the space available for recreation opportunities. Frequently, public agencies lack the financial resources and/or regulatory authority to provide additional recreation opportunities as quickly as the private sector can undertake new development.

An aging population results in more people with increased leisure time in retirement. Aging can bring declines in physical capacity, requiring facilities that are accessible to all. Retirement may also bring reductions in income that constrain recreation choices, limiting travel

or the use of commercial recreation options, thus causing even more reliance on local public recreation infrastructure.

Cultural diversity may bring with it new styles of recreation, such as the preference for recreating in extended family groups among Hispanics. Instead or in addition, cultural diversity may lead to new ways of using available resources, such as the replacement of football by soccer as the dominant use of some playing fields.

A place in the country has long been desired as a recreation amenity by many Americans. Often the chosen location is one with high scenic values, accessible water-based recreation, or commercially developed recreation facilities such as a ski area. Or it may be as simple as a cabin in prime hunting territory. This once simple home away from home has been “supersized” by affluence, as wealthy outsiders have begun buying up extensive acreage in prime areas and building showplace estates. Geographer Jared Diamond describes this phenomenon and its broad, disruptive social consequences in his recent book *Collapse*. Long-time local residents are deprived of lands they once used freely for recreation, finding the commercial use of natural resources challenged and their lifestyles demeaned and threatened.

Economics

Such invasions of the wealthy into the countryside are but one sign of the contemporary economic scene. At the other end of the housing market, individuals who were granted home mortgages that they could not afford are currently experiencing financial turmoil and personal hardship, particularly as the payments escalate. Although individuals may experience financial difficulties—including the loss of a home—at any time, the magnitude of the current mortgage crisis is seriously impacting individuals, communities, financial institutions, and government policies on aiding failing companies. If the mortgage troubles continue, the deterioration of communities may cause long-term negative impacts on many community activities, including recreation.

Over time, these wide differences in economic status and the usual cycles of expansion, slowing, and retraction are expected to prevail. Currently, the American economic operating base is at a higher level than in the past. Continuing globalization of business may reduce this operating base level in the future, given the export of jobs (first in manufacturing but now in more technical positions, particularly in the computer and information technology fields).

The governors convened by President Roosevelt in 1908 presided in a nation largely self-sufficient in natural resources. Today, increased global demands for various natural resources by

industrial Asian nations such as Japan, China, and India pose competition for American needs, especially energy. Such increased demand could portend higher costs of living in the years ahead. Recent news reports indicate that inflation in China is increasing the cost of goods imported into the United States. Thus, the relative affluence of today's American consumers may change; this may alter, in type and frequency, their ability to partake in recreation. The decline in the value of the dollar versus the euro is already impacting one form of recreation—overseas travel—for many Americans. As long as the value of the dollar versus the euro remains low, more would-be overseas travelers may seek their recreation in the United States (or other locations with a more favorable exchange rate). Given a cheap dollar, however, foreign travelers are likely to seek out American recreation opportunities themselves.

Nevertheless, new diversions and outdoor recreation toys continually appear on the American recreation scene. The 2005 California State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan notes that recreation activities there increasingly involve motorization or mechanization. Thus, off-road vehicles, bicycles, and other modes of individual transportation are more prevalent each year. These are supplemented by other electronic technology, such as cell phones and GPS devices. This combination of new technology and willing consumers continues to alter the challenges of outdoor recreation management. The trend of these users is to go farther faster, increasing their need for space and posing a conflict with other users in the same recreation space engaging in different activities.

Another aspect of electronic technology is the appeal of computers and the Internet as recreational venues. The younger generation, particularly, is attracted to these devices; children and young adults now spend a great deal of their available time alone indoors playing computer games and surfing the Internet. Many observers express concern over the immediate social and health consequences of these largely sedentary, solitary activities, whereas recreation planners wonder what the long-term implications will be for future recreation demand if an entire generation is not gaining familiarity with outdoor activities.

Energy concerns periodically impinge upon outdoor recreation. When the oil embargo of the 1970s constrained supplies, recreation travelers worried about the availability of gasoline if they traveled. More recently, rising fuel prices have impacted both recreational motorists and airline passengers, as well as those who operate recreation vehicles, from motorhomes to motorboats and snowmobiles. Although gasoline prices dropped somewhat in 2008 from their peak that year, increasing industrialization around the world would seem to indicate greater demand for petroleum in the future. However, some energy experts contend that we are using world petroleum supplies faster than we are locating new reserves, such that prices will increase

with scarcity in the coming years. Alternative fuels, such as biofuels, hydrogen, and electricity are seen as possible means of maintaining the automobile, which is important for personal mobility generally and, in particular, for the access it provides to recreation. Innovations in public transportation, perhaps including high-speed rail as is found in Europe, may also contribute to longer-distance recreation locales.

A more recent energy-related concern is the perceived threat of climate change posed by carbon dioxide emissions from internal combustion engines and electrical energy production. Some are now criticizing the “carbon footprint” involved in air travel, for instance. Although some travelers feel guilty about such impacts, the long-term effect on travel remains to be seen.

Politics

Partisanship denied the findings and recommendations of the President’s Commission on Americans Outdoors even the courtesy of a hearing in 1987 following the change in party control in the Senate after the 1986 election. To many observers, the partisan divisions have worsened through 2008. The growing backlog of unresolved major problems before the Congress—the mortgage, banking, and Wall Street issues being particularly prominent at the moment—may make it more difficult for issues such as recreation to gain much attention in the short term, regardless of the importance of the subject to the health, welfare, and economy of the country.

At the state level, the picture is brighter, as legislatures continue, for the most part, to provide funding for outdoor recreation through appropriations or bond issues. In many cases, recreation professionals would like to see more funds and are concerned about future funding to meet the demands of a growing population.

Questions for the Future

To ensure the adequate provision of outdoor recreation opportunities now and for generations to come—and to provide sufficient stewardship of the natural resources on which such activities depend—we must periodically assess outdoor recreation in the United States to determine if regulatory or legislative changes are required. The last such review was conducted 20 years ago and, although some aspects of American outdoor recreation have remained largely unchanged in that time, many other factors have changed substantially. Therefore, the establishment of a new, bipartisan outdoor recreation review commission composed of

individuals representing diverse stakeholder interests would provide considerable public benefit at this time. Such a review in the year 2008 might address a number of issues and questions.

First, a new outdoor recreation review commission might assess present and anticipated future recreation demand nationwide by estimating the number of Americans—and visitors to the United States—who use federal, state, local, and private outdoor recreation resources and facilities, their demographics and economic status, and expected changes in their demographics and economic status in the next 20 years. Additional questions by which to gauge demand include the following:

- Where do individuals choose to engage in outdoor recreation activities—adjacent to or within urban areas; in remote, less disturbed areas; or in intermediate locations?
- How important is outdoor recreation to Americans and visitors to the United States?
- Which activities are pursued by users of outdoor recreation resources, and how are users' preferences for activities changing?
- How are federal, state, local, and private natural resource managers adjusting to these changes?
- Do the requirements of different user groups—such as motorized recreationists, hikers, baseball or soccer leagues, wildlife watchers, hunters, and anglers—conflict? If so, do such conflicts tend to alter subsequent demand?

Second, this new commission might consider factors affecting the current and anticipated future supply of outdoor recreation opportunities. These factors include issues related to currently available land and facilities; outdoor recreation-related policies at the federal, state, and local levels; and funding available for the purchase of new and maintenance of existing land and facilities, for adequate staffing, for the development and implementation of recreation programs, and for the enforcement of recreation-related laws and regulations. Specific questions for this assessment might include the following:

- What is the extent and nature of available federal, state, local, and privately owned recreation resources, and what is the condition of these recreation lands and facilities?
- How can we expect the availability of land and facilities to change in the next 20 years?
- Are agency staffing levels adequate to meet the current and anticipated future recreation demand? Are personnel adequately trained, equipped, and supported? Is personnel diversity—and sensitivity to cultural differences in recreation needs—sufficient to match the increasing diversity of the population? If not, what changes in funding, policy, or organization are required to meet the current and anticipated future recreation demand?

- Do current outdoor recreation facility and program levels meet current and anticipated future needs? If not, what changes in funding, policy, or organization are required to meet the demand?
- Which agencies are responsible for promoting outdoor recreation and meeting recreation demands?
- How effective is the cooperation among federal, state, and local agencies—and between agencies and private landowners—in providing outdoor recreation opportunities and in promoting outdoor recreation?
- How do natural resource managers prevent or resolve conflicts among competing land uses and among recreational user groups?
- Are current laws, regulations, and policies adequate to ensure that the demand for outdoor recreation opportunities can be met without promoting conflict among user groups, reducing opportunities for future generations of outdoor recreationists, or degrading natural resources?

At the federal level, it would also be informative to determine which authorities—and responsibilities—are in place but are not being implemented as recreation management tools. This would include the provisions of P.L. 88–29 with regard to the preparation of a Nationwide Outdoor Recreation Plan, the operation of a Bureau of Outdoor Recreation or similar office within the U.S. Department of Interior, and the reestablishment of the Recreation Advisory Council as it was originally conceived.

Similarly, a review of the additional funding allocations made from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), beginning in 1998, for nontraditional LWCF “other programs” uses is in order. These uses include the examples cited in a July 2006 Congressional Research Service (CRS) report on the LWCF: U.S. Forest Service “highway rehabilitation and maintenance,” “the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program,” and Forest Service “State and Private Forestry programs.” Such “other programs” have been funded annually since fiscal year (FY) 2000. Since FY2001, appropriations for the other programs have accounted for 16 to 62 percent of the total annual LWCF appropriations. Between FY2001 and FY2006, other programs funding exceeded the amount allocated to all 50 states (by five times as much in FY2001) in all but FY2002.

An assessment of the economic benefits of outdoor recreation would also be beneficial. In particular, the new commission may choose to consider which sectors of the economy benefit from various outdoor recreation activities, such as camping, fishing, or rafting, and how such benefits are expected to change over time. An economic assessment may be particularly useful in justifying to Congress and to stakeholders the continuation or enhancement of programs or improvements to facilities.

The new outdoor recreation review commission might also attempt to anticipate how current and future technologies may affect recreation. Specifically, the commission might ask which emerging products and processes may impact outdoor recreation demand in the future, and how (e.g., by increasing or reducing demand or by altering recreation activity preferences). In addition, some new technologies might affect the management of recreation resources and the provision of recreation services to users; the new commission may choose to predict such changes. For example, the enhanced availability and accessibility of GPS devices may promote increased use of backcountry and wilderness areas for hiking, backpacking, and skiing. However, this increased use may also necessitate greater education and outreach efforts (e.g., “bear aware” and “leave no trace”) and greater emergency response capabilities of natural resource managers.

The new commission may turn to a number of sources to research the issues and questions above. For example, the commission may seek information from federal, state, and local agencies, comprehensive outdoor recreation plans prepared by state recreation planning offices, professional meetings of resource planners and managers, university researchers in a wide array of disciplines, and private corporations and trade associations active in the recreation field. In addition, Congress could call on its support agencies to help answer a number of these questions. The Government Accountability Office, for instance, could be asked to inquire into the status of responsibilities under P.L. 88–29. The CRS could be tasked with a survey of congressional earmarks to determine which of these have recreation-related purposes. Monies so allocated might readily be covered by statewide LWCF grants if that program were more adequately funded.

Conclusion

To ensure the adequate provision of outdoor recreation opportunities now and for generations to come—and to provide sufficient stewardship of the natural resources on which such activities depend—we can benefit from periodic assessments of the state of outdoor recreation in the United States. This will help us determine what regulatory or legislative changes might be needed. The last such review was conducted 20 years ago and although some aspects of American outdoor recreation have remained largely unchanged in that time, many other factors have changed substantially.

Our relationship with the outdoors has changed from one in which we used natural resources out of pure necessity to one in which we voluntarily engage in outdoor activities for leisure, enjoyment, and adventure. We value the outdoors—from the local urban greenway to a national park halfway across the country—for the opportunity to enjoy nature, exercise, and

interact with family and friends. A new, comprehensive review of outdoor recreation needs and opportunities will help us determine how best to maintain our traditional ties with the outdoors, foster the economic benefits of outdoor recreation activities, and protect our streams, forests, grasslands, shorelines, wildlife, and urban parks for the enjoyment of future generations.