

## RECREATION PLANNING: A DISCUSSION<sup>1</sup>

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The following paper will be found to be a most interesting and valuable contribution to an important subject. Dr. Meinecke first analyzes the basic concepts of recreation planning; he then carefully scrutinizes the objectives; and finally considers specific treatments and developments. It is shown that the development of recreational areas in a forest always disturbs the existing biological order and that serious consequences are unavoidable. It is also shown that every time the government raises the standards of recreational facilities it commits itself to raise the standards of such facilities still higher. Recreational development, once begun, implies an endless chain of changes.

RECREATION planning is a wide and big field; you can include all kinds of things under that term. It would take weeks and weeks to discuss even the main features, and we shall have to confine ourselves, I think, to certain principles and fundamentals. Not a single word of what I am going to say can be new to you.

I, myself, as you know, am not a planner. I do not plan recreation. I am just a helper but I have seen quite a good deal of planning and a good deal of development that obviously was not planning. I think that we can learn more from the mistakes than from positive instruction.

Before we proceed it will be well to call to mind a few fundamental concepts.

It seems to me that first of all, in all planning—recreational or any other kind—we must be sure of our objective. What is the whole thing about? What are we striving for? That should always be clear in our minds. Unfortunately it is not always clear.

Most important is the second question, that of the need. The determination of the need of a recreational development is an essential part of all intelligent planning. You will agree that both in the National Park and State Park Services, in the Forest Service and in municipal developments, the question of the proved need has none too often been considered. Frequently the need has been injected later into the project. In other words, a

need has too often been construed; it has been artificially made and used for the justification of a certain project.

We have further to consider what the limits are to recreational development. We have in the National Parks, and that goes also for State Parks, very definite limitations that are based on the curious setup on which the whole system is based. All parks have for their main objective the protection of certain essential values for which the park areas were selected. A park area is chosen and set aside only because it has certain values—historical, aesthetic, or geological—and these values must be protected. It is not merely a question of protecting the park itself, its boundaries and its physical contents. The protection must extend, in fact it must specifically be directed to, the preservation of the essential and characteristic values of the park.

But there is another side to it. We must make these values available to the enjoyment by the public, and here we invariably get into a compromise, the eternal compromise between the main objective for which a park has been created, and the principle of use and enjoyment by the people—a compromise that cannot possibly be overcome. One cannot be reconciled with the other. As in all compromises, the outcome is never quite satisfactory. One or the other side has to suffer, but we may hold on to this fundamental principle that while a certain restraint in recreational development does

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not render public use impossible the failure to protect essential values spells ruin to the park itself. Half of the problems in park administration arise from this compromise, and nothing is more important than a constant and conscientious weighing of one side against the other in order to strike a workable balance between the two.

Since the main objective in each park is the protection of essential values, one of the most important principles must be that of minimum damage done. Every time I invade an intact unit of values, I prejudice that unit in some way or other—I impair it; I do take away something of its value. Recreational planning must be guided by the principle of minimal damage. It is dangerous to let oneself be carried along blindly by the enthusiasm of creating things.

Another point that I want to bring out right in the beginning is that of consequences and of the necessity of evaluating these consequences—the necessity of constantly being conscious of this one truth, that every act has its consequences and that every step taken leads to another step. That this simple fact is so commonly forgotten constitutes perhaps the greatest weakness of our people. We do things for the sole fun of doing them and we get that fun from the doing. No matter what the cost is and no matter what the future cost is going to be, we indulge in our pet weakness. This loading of immense burdens of obligations on shoulders of the unborn is the unforgivable sin in our American life.

As foresters you are particularly interested in one of the long list of consequences which is inseparable from any act of expansion. There is no physical improvement involving appreciable areas that is without effect on the ecology of the stand or the forest in which it is located. In minor cases the effect may be almost negligible. In others it is so serious that large parts of the very area that

is entitled to protection as part of the park are in jeopardy. Once the series of ecological changes has been set in motion the process goes on for a long time, and the changes do not always go in the same direction but may branch out so that the end effect will be entirely different from what may at first have been intended or foreseen.

Now that we have cleared our way we can go on to a more detailed discussion. Let us first consider objectives.

Broadly speaking there are three main objectives in recreational planning. These have obviously nothing directly to do with the objectives of the parks—that is, protection of the values involved. When you plan for recreation you do not plan for the purpose of protecting an existing value, but for something entirely different: You plan for the dangers to the very thing you are in duty bound to protect. Wise planning demands a constant awareness of this fact.

First, we have to let the public come into the park. They have to be able to move in, on roads and trails. But one cannot build roads and trails without injury to aesthetic values or to the ecological integrity of the area involved. The matter does not end here. Once the people are in the park it becomes necessary to make it possible for them to live and establish a temporary home. Ground must be cleared to make room for living quarters, and as more and more of these quarters run together into communities the demand and the necessity become imperative of erecting public conveniences to make community life safe. The park is now under the influence, not of individual visitors, but of masses.

The people do not want to be confined to where they have established their temporary abode, and they do not restrict their movements to the road leading from the entrance to where they are going to stop. In self-protection the administrator must provide more roads, more trails.

More and more of the hitherto protected land is invaded. Every encroachment destroys or impairs some of the essential values.

With the influx of masses also comes the problem of keeping them contented. In the old and simple days the campers entertained themselves but today camp entertainment is more and more becoming one of the services furnished by the government. Again this means expansion, since the features which go with entertainment—camp fire circles, outdoor theatres, playgrounds for children, and playgrounds for grownups, swimming pools—all require space, and that entails cutting out more and more of wild land you are supposed to protect. Entertainment is one of the factors which are inimical to the fundamental objectives of the park. You are bound to destroy something of what you have undertaken not to destroy, and the destruction extends not merely to the removal or impairment of physical objects, of trees and forests and meadows, but it invariably breaks up the continuity and permanence of the landscape, that is, the foundations of its emotional and aesthetic quality. Again you are up against the eternal compromise. Whatever course you decide upon, keep in mind that far more is at stake than the loss of trees. They will spring up again. But once the unity of the landscape is destroyed its charm is lost forever. You must weigh advantage against disadvantage. Everything you do to the living forest is a potential danger to its aesthetic aspect. The worst is that the damage is irreparable since the reclamation even of an abandoned main road on a slope or of a large camp ground is practically impossible. No one will claim that the forest killed by the deep cuts and by overcast of a road on a steep, rocky slope can ever be restored.

We come to our second fundamental—the needs. Right here we should do a little clarifying of ideas. A development

may be desirable but not actually needed. To some it may seem desirable to cut a roadway through a Big tree. No one will say that it is needed. Further, a development may be needed without being desirable. Our hand may be forced to do something we really do not desire. There is a further distinction to be made between a need and a necessity. A need may be felt for roadside cleanup. It becomes a necessity only in definite cases. An ample supply of good water in a small camp ground is surely desirable. There is also a need for it, but there is no necessity for the installation of an expensive system of pipe lines and an overabundance of faucets.

There are many men who carefully weigh desirability, need and necessity. Others, not so well balanced, just go ahead because it gives them an outlet for their energies. This has resulted, in many cases, in an overdevelopment. Is a project really needed and not just desirable? That is the first question we must ask ourselves. There may be many factors that influence the answer to that question—an inadequacy or a poor arrangement of living quarters; too scant a supply of water, and others. These would tend to make a necessity out of an improvement project; but there is something else involved—the problem of use. A camp ground may be provided with water of insufficient quantity and poor quality for an ideal setup. I have seen camp grounds laid out for 20 to 25 parties with water sufficient for only 10 or 12. There would seem to be a need for the improvement of that water supply but since the camp ground is not used by more than 9 or 10 people at a time there can be no possible reason for going to heavy expense for improving the water system. There exists no need since the water supply is sufficient for the number of people who actually use that camp ground. This camp ground obviously was developed beyond the real need in the first place. Once it

was in existence, the urge to develop it fully, against a non-existing use, brought up the question of a better water supply. It would have been wiser to wait until the people show by their more frequent visits that more water is actually needed.

That leads to us the next point: What is the probable future use of the unit that I am dealing with? This is largely conjecture; but we want to remember this: that while the tastes of the public are curiously unpredictable we can predict definitely this one thing, that artificial stimulation of use may produce unexpected and odd results. The public in the beginning chose its own gathering places. The visitor took out of the many possibilities of a park a place here and a place there, preferring them obviously to others. We came in and helped that along. We protected those particular places; we developed water and other facilities, and encouraged the people to stay in the places which had been selected by the people themselves. Most of the locations of camp grounds have been in use for many years, from before the days of the Park Service. That is largely because the locations were the most suitable ones, at least for those days. But the old timers who chose a shady spot near running water to set up their primitive camp never thought of probable future use by others and even less of use by masses of people so that today many of these camp grounds are badly overcrowded, and still the people crowd in. On the other hand, many highly desirable camp grounds are abandoned by the public, for no apparent reason. There is no accounting for the camper's tastes.

The problem, therefore, is largely one of presumptive use. This is particularly true when it comes to the development of new units. You go out and choose a unit that has not been used before, and set up new camp grounds, picnic places, etc., and tell the people to make themselves at home. But there is much more to it:

Every time a new unit is formed and improved, you advertise, with the strongest means at your disposal, to the public that you have chosen something that the public has missed, that is outstanding and better than anything it has had before.

What are the consequences? Every time expansive improvements are made, land is cleared. These encroachments go on and on and become ever larger and larger. Even a small camp ground takes a good deal out of a forest. The clearing of a small spot does not do much harm as a rule. Many of these bare spots, lying close together as in a camp ground, collectively exert a decided ecological influence. Have we the right to go into the forest and plan recreational development unless we keep in mind that we are invariably doing some damage, and unless we weigh how much damage is likely to result? The camper is not responsible for the damage done by the opening up of the forest for his convenience. We are the ones who are responsible and we must be quite certain that the ends sought actually justify the means employed. We have the same thing to consider with regard to the approaches, the roads we build to let the people come in and to make it possible for the people to move about. The actual destruction of the timber on the right-of-way is neither very serious nor very great. The effect of the modern highway as a wind canyon in the forest is a different matter. The loss and damage to the forest resulting from these artificial wind canyons, quite apart from the aesthetic aspect, can hardly be over-estimated. The worst is that they are not confined to the immediate vicinity of the right-of-way but often extend far into the stand. In parks with a high wind ratio, and most of our high elevation parks belong in that category, the greatest caution must be exercised in opening up the stand. We should think twice before venturing to break the continuity of the canopy which is the result of centuries of slow

adaptations to existing conditions. We should also think twice before building high-standard roads on steep slopes, necessitating enormous cuts. The profound change brought about in underground drainage is the cause of the extremely heavy loss in trees on the upper side of the road. The overcast on the down-hill side, changing as it does the soil ecology, is responsible for an additional heavy loss so that many a highway leading through formerly beautiful country is now lined on both sides by desolate stands of snags. The worst of the picture is that there is no hope for recovery within centuries to come, and the same holds true for roads built on slopes of mountains and hills and for the tremendous cuts that are necessary and which affect the drainage.

These are not the only consequences. It is too often forgotten that every one of our acts entails a promise. Every step leads to a next step. In the old days there was a question of whether it was possible and permissible to extend high-standard roads into the back country. It was the first road of this character built which definitely conveyed the message to the people of the United States that such roads are not only permissible but legitimate. Once that message was understood it led to an avalanche of demands for more and more, and the end is not in sight. The tunnel at Zion paved the way for the tunnel at Wawona. That first tunnel was a message; it told the people of the world that it is not only possible to build a tunnel in parks but that it is also permissible and legitimate to do so. Invariably one step leads to another.

Invariably also the introduction of a standard and the raising of a standard lead to still higher standards. Here we come, of course, to one of the most difficult problems. We should never forget that the temptation to give the people something a little better invariably leads to more and more demands, and leads, above all, to an increase of the things the

public takes for granted, and this has a sociological aspect of fundamental importance. Just as we took it for granted in the old days that we were permitted to go into the forest, and to cook over a few stones thrown together and to take water from the creek, so today the accepted and expected standard is the prepared camp ground, the built fireplace, the piped water supply, the well-made camp road, the high standard kitchen facilities and washing facilities, the first-class sanitary arrangements—much of this far better than 50 per cent of the people enjoy in their own homes. Invariably the offering of luxuries leads to more demands, something a little better, something of a little higher standard, thus leading to the possibility of making them dissatisfied with what they have, a condition which too often we of the government have unwittingly fostered.

So it is advisable that in recreation planning we keep in mind the danger of going to extremes in making things too comfortable. Making camp grounds artificially attractive leads to ever greater intensification of use and therefore of expansion. It also has one other and highly undesirable effect, namely, that many people are attracted less by the beauty of the park itself than by the city comforts they cannot afford at home. It leads to further penetration of virgin ground when the saturation point at one place has been reached.

Let us turn to specific treatment and first discuss shortly recreation planning on sites that have been developed in the past. It is rather difficult to do anything with an old site, whether it is a camp ground, a picnic ground, or even a park village. Most of the older developments have grown without any planning and were highly expansive. The developments went in all directions without any special order, so that the characteristic feature of the old unit is the scattering of its elements. That often gave them a certain

charm and aesthetic attractiveness. To make out of an old unit a more modern one is difficult, not only because of the irregularity of distribution of its component parts but mainly because it is often almost impossible to bring them together with a rational road system. In such cases one must try to do the best possible under the circumstances. But I would say this: Wherever you have to deal with a unit of definite charm, which has grown and matured in decades, the most dangerous thing you can do is to introduce a modern feature. Rather leave it alone than try to make it appear new. This mistake has been made quite frequently. Think of the ecological aspect. The old unit has settled down to normal. The trees and shrubs that were unable to adjust themselves to the original invasion have died out and the rest have been able to adapt themselves to the new conditions. The ideal would be to let that ecological setup alone as much as possible. Do not introduce again, in planning, an artificial setup. Do not expose the unit that has already suffered to another period of suffering. It may be too much.

Let us now consider the development of new sites and the dangers this brings in its wake. You look for new sites because you consider that the old recreation centers are either no longer very desirable or that their possibilities of use have been practically exhausted. That is the message you convey to the public, and that must be part of your planning philosophy. It suggests this thought; that you have raised a hitherto unknown spot out of the mass of the other components of the park, above the rest, and that thereby you have taken over an obligation, a responsibility. The responsibility lies in telling the public that you have chosen this as something particularly suitable. If your judgment is wrong you are going to disappoint the public. There are many examples of misjudgment in the choice of new units, and the cost of these mistakes

runs to a tremendous amount in money and in disappointment to the people. Not infrequently the lack of popularity of a place has meant almost the abandonment of the whole setup, all as a consequence of poor planning and poor judgment.

I would say therefore that after the general need for a new unit has been plainly demonstrated, even then we must use caution. We want to be quite certain that the chosen new unit is the one that is needed. Remember that every step makes necessary other steps, that every improvement involves a definite commitment, a definite obligation, not only implied, of upkeep and maintenance to a standard, of service up to a standard, and it means a very definite promise for further development. As soon as the use of that unit comes close to the saturation point, the government is obligated to go on further and further. It cannot go back. Once a unit has been called into existence it is there practically forever. On the other hand, the government cannot afford to close a unit or abandon one of its larger enterprises even if they have outgrown their use, as private business would undoubtedly do. In self-defense it must be conservative and slow in permitting even the operators to scrap a unit that does no longer pay. The lesson to draw from all this is that initiative in improvements and in setting and raising of standards must be guided and tempered by foresight and good judgment.

I want to illustrate, on the basis of one example, the unavailability of consequences of any departure from the existing order.

I spoke of the fact that the government is committed by every step it takes to maintain at least the status quo. It cannot lower its standards. But it is also committed to further exertions as soon as it introduces something above the existing level. By that act it announces that it considers it permissible to go beyond the previous level, and that immediately forces

the government to go further and further. As an example of the chain of events that are set in motion through an initial act, let us follow the development that came about through the admission of the automobile into the parks. Whether the automobile ever could have been kept out of the parks is a purely academic question and does not concern us in the least. The sudden popularity of the motor vehicle created an irresistible pressure, and that at a time when no one could foresee its present high development. The public, at first, simply wanted to drive into the parks. Let us see what followed, quite logically, step by step. I shall speak only of those aspects which have to do with the changes in park quality. What all these developments have meant in terms of money or of administrative difficulties and complications does not concern us here.

1. Automobiles were admitted, at first under very strict control. The public had asked to be permitted to drive in to the end of the line, and that was granted. At the point of destination the cars had to stop. They were immobilized and could not be used for traveling around within the park. That could not last. The public demanded more. Since the government had announced that the presence of automobiles within the parks was permissible and that travel on the main entrance roads was legitimate it could not, with logic, object to their use on other roads. The standard set had to be changed and its level raised. Restriction broke down, slowly at first, very rapidly thereafter.

2. The simple original roads had to be improved for motor use, broadened, graded, and raised to ever higher standards. New roads had to be built, cross-country roads, connecting roads, short cuts, new entrance roads.

3. A serious parking problem soon arose, necessitating deep cuts into park land on the roadsides and turning whole acres of wild land into parking areas.

4. Traffic control was introduced. Traffic signs, a feature characteristic of the city and highway civilization, came into the wilderness. The traffic cop came into existence. Look-out points were improved, and stopping points along the road were made safe for the enjoyment of scenery. That again meant, in each case, some sacrifice of parts of the park itself, in addition to the sacrifice necessitated by the improvement and extension of existing roads. And since good roads attract travel they led to ever heavier concentration of the floating population. Public pressure, at first moderate, became stronger and stronger and the demand for more and more modern roads increased to the point that today the Park Service is on the defensive, just as is the Forest Service.

5. Another development that could never have come about without the automobile is the tunnel. The automobile made filling stations and garages necessary, both conspicuous city features requiring much space and demanding a considerable sacrifice of wild land.

6. The automobile meant rather expansive development of checking stations with their accessories and often very considerable broadening of roads; more rangers were needed. It also led to the installation of an extended lighting system.

7. It meant ever deeper and deeper penetration of the wild by man in large numbers. The more people come into the park, the more policing is necessary. In certain parks policing required the erection of a jail. The fact that you have a jail in the park stamps the latter as a semi-city unit; it is no longer uncontaminated by the city spirit.

8. The automobiles had a profound influence on the wilderness, on the forest, on wildlife. The invasion of the wilderness by large numbers drives wildlife away, though not all wildlife, for instance certain species of deer that are not afraid of man. But there are other forms quite

intolerant of man that will not stay where man arrives en masse.

9. The automobile, by demanding higher standards of roads, is responsible for tremendous cuts and has brought about profound changes in underground drainage. I spoke of wind canyons and their effect on the ecology of the forest. That may sound like an academic notion. It becomes very practical when, under the impact of unaccustomed and often violent windstorms, the forest begins to recede. Then the essence of the park itself is touched and the loss of trees becomes an aesthetic and emotional one. The change induced touches the very thing you want to protect.

I repeat that the advisability, in general, of admitting automobiles into the parks does not concern us at all. What interests us is the analysis of the consequences which, I feel certain, the public at the time did not foresee. It is most unlikely that you will ever be called upon to make such momentous decisions. But on a lesser scale the same rule will hold true for all your actions. Every major operation is a lever which upsets the existing balance and sets in motion whole series of often only partly predictable events.

It seems to me, then, that what is essential in all recreation planning is *caution, wisdom, and judgment*. It must be, first, definitely demonstrated and proved that any improvement or development is *needed*, and when it is needed, it must be proved that it is also necessary. Desirability, need and necessity are not equivalent terms as I have tried to point out before. In either case we should weigh desirability, need or necessity against the probable damage and the consequences they will entail. We have not always been wise in that respect.

Here is where one great difficulty injects itself, and that is the fact that we are not the only agency in the parks which deals with recreation. No recreation planning, I think, is complete unless it is done with

due consideration of the operator's interests and of the operator's duties. While the operator ostensibly caters to a different group of visitors there is of necessity a great deal of overlapping and of duplication of service, as for instance in the matter of baths. While the question of baths for the public lies outside the range of your activities there are many occasions in which you must be able to judge the ecological effect of improvements or new installations on the operator's grounds. Housekeeping camps, camp fire units, amusement and entertainment features, playgrounds, service roads, hotels, lodges and outbuildings, garages and filling stations, parking areas, underground water conduits, electric and telephone lines, they all affect, to a greater or lesser degree, the ecology of the area, and they all, without exception, affect it adversely. There is always damage and loss. It is up to you to foresee what damage and loss are likely to amount to and to counteract them so far as is possible. And no matter whether any of these or related improvements and structures are located on operator's or on the government's land, it is your responsibility to see to it that the biological units which we call forest, woodland, glen and meadow are not irretrievably changed or destroyed in character and spirit. Your field is the preservation of the friendly atmosphere of the green woods and meadows in which our visitors feel at home and whence comes their real recreation.

One outstanding object lesson was wiped out by fire this summer. Many Glacier, like so much of the higher country in alpine regions, is blessed with extraordinarily beautiful scenery and cursed with an extraordinarily harsh climate. The sparse forest has established itself precariously through the centuries in a bitter fight against arctic cold and fierce winter gales. It was barely able to exist in an unstable ecological balance, none too safe even when left alone. When

Many Glacier was made accessible through modern roads the incoming public had to be taken care of, and the scarcity of suitable camping sites forced the development of public camp grounds in the only wooded areas available which unfortunately were located at the narrow end of a natural wind funnel. Now, one cannot develop a camp without sacrificing trees, and the opening up of the canopy gave free play to the onslaught of the gales. The old camp ground was soon ruined. Its unregulated use by the public simply hastened the inevitable end. The new camp ground met the same fate. On outer fringes the trees had already begun to die in alarmingly large numbers when the fire of 1936 destroyed the entire area.

The road to Two Medicine in Glacier National Park offers another illustration of the principle we are discussing. Starting from Trick Falls Bridge the right-of-way cuts a wide swath through fairly dense forest at about a right angle to the direction of the westerly winter storms. On the windward side no damage is visible. The forest wall is adapting itself to new conditions. On the lee side the effect of the strong winds on the trees which had grown up under the protection of their neighbors is striking. There is no adjustment. All trees are plainly suffering, many are dying and the forest is receding. On the turn following the straight stretch the effect is even more pronounced and little short of disastrous. It will take many years before anything like a balance is again reached. In the meantime this stretch of road and forest is definitely ugly. The spirit, the essence of the forest has been violated through the violation of ecological principles. The deplorable state of the Two Medicine Camp Ground is due partly to unregulated traffic but to a large part also to the establishment of a camp ground in an area that, ecologically, could not stand any disturbance.

I am not discussing the reasons for these and many other developments. That

lies entirely outside of our field. We are interested only in the consequences; it is always possible to plan wisely but it is not always possible to abide by that plan. Circumstances may be such as to leave one no choice but to accept a compromise. From the point of view of strict protection development of the rim area at Crater Lake is, of course, not defensible. That area is today entirely different from what it was 25 years ago. But if large numbers of visitors had to be accommodated at a place where they could enjoy that scenery of rarest beauty there was nothing left but to provide for ample space and for all the accommodations that go with the presence of a large population. No matter what particular location on the rim of the crater would have been selected the results would have been the same.

My plea is that, wherever there is a choice, the ecological consequences be given due consideration. Cutting into a wind-exposed stand always involves a risk. It becomes doubly dangerous when the stand barely has a chance to survive in its natural state. Many a meadow of beauty and charm has been needlessly destroyed through a change of the drainage.

Keep in mind just these things: That in all planning desirability alone is not sufficient ground for action, that you want to be quite sure of the existing need and absolutely sure of the necessity. Above all, keep in mind the consequences. The end result of the many involved processes set in motion is the only thing that counts, and the end in this sense does not coincide with the completion of the job in hand. Man, in his impatience and energy, undoes in a few weeks the creative processes of centuries, all too often unconscious of the violence he is doing to Nature and too rarely asking himself what his work is going to look like in ten or twenty years.