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**NPS  
Wilderness  
Program**

# Fax

**To:** Michael Edwards                      **From:** Rick Potts  

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**Fax:** (303) 987-6782                      **Date:** January 26, 2005  

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**Phone:** (303) 987-6953                      **Pages:** 4 (including this one)  

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**Re:** 1956 Letter from NPS Director      **CC:**

**Urgent**     **For Review**     **Please Comment**     **Please Reply**     **Please Recycle**

**Michael,**

**Copy of letter from 1956 NPS Director Connie Wirth to Wilderness Act author Howard Zahniser arguing against NPS inclusion in the Wilderness Act.**

**Let me know if it's not legible, and I will transcribe it into a Word doc.**

**Thanks!**

~~FILE~~  
YOUR FILE

Box 48  
American Forestry Assoc. Records  
FHS Durham, NC

In reply refer to:  
148-L

Natl. Wilderness  
Preserv. System  
MAR 19 1956 Proposed

Mr. Howard Zahniser  
Council of Conservationists  
6222 43rd Avenue  
Hyattsville, Maryland

Dear Mr. Zahniser:

We appreciated the opportunity to discuss with you and Messrs. Brower and Woodbury the draft of bill which, if enacted, would be known as the National Wilderness Preservation Act. After reviewing the bill, we offer these general comments on its substantive provisions.

At the outset we would like to say, although we are sure you know it already, that we in the National Park Service wholeheartedly favor the preservation of wilderness areas. Therefore, the comments which follow were prepared in the light of the proposed bill and our actual experience under the National Park Service acts, and do not represent a lack of sympathy for the over-all objective of the bill.

The bill would include within the National Wilderness Preservation System certain primeval areas located within national parks and monuments. The reason for so including them is to reserve and maintain them "for the public purpose of recreational, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use and enjoyment by the people in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness."

It is our belief that such primeval areas of national parks and monuments are, in fact, already wilderness areas with adequate protection against future nonconforming use. They are, as provided in the act of August 23, 1916 (39 Stat. 535), administered so as to " \* \* \* conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." In these circumstances, it is our view that nothing would be gained from placing such areas in the National Wilderness Preservation System as provided in the bill.

GLACIER BAY  
DEATH VALLEY

On the contrary, we feel that by lumping national park and monument areas with other types of areas such as national forest areas, national wildlife refuges, and Indian Reservation areas, it is probable that the degree of preservation afforded the park and monument areas could be diminished. While section 3 states that the bill shall not be " \* \* \* interpreted as interfering with the primary stated purpose for which any national park or monument \* \* \* was, or may be, established, \* \* \*" nevertheless, subsequent provisions of the section open the degree of preservation and protection to interpretation and past administrative practices of the various governmental agencies involved. For example, lumbering, mining, grazing, water impoundment, reservoir storage, roads, airfields, etc., are prohibited except "as may be required in connection with use or administration of the area for wilderness recreation or other appropriate purpose." The term "wilderness recreation or other appropriate purpose" is subject to various interpretations. We are, therefore, concerned lest combining the several types of areas would cause the degree of preservation which could be afforded to settle to the lowest level applicable to any of the types of areas involved.

Let me say that we are not so concerned with the bill as drawn as we are with the final one which may be enacted. It is the judgment of some people who should know that the proposal will be opposed by water development, mining, grazing, and timber interests in the West. Such a situation will, no doubt, lead to compromise provisions and these can only mean that the standards which are now set so high by law for the National Park System will be lowered. Despite my interest in the objectives of the proposed act, I feel that we cannot afford to run this risk.

The functions of the commission created under section 5 are not clear, yet for various purposes the commission would presumably be superimposed upon the existing administration of the several types of areas affected by the bill. Therefore, considerable difficulty could arise from the failure to define precisely the commission's function.

It is observed that the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution would become the Secretary of the commission. Undoubtedly the Smithsonian Institution is prominent in its field. However, so far as we know, its background in the preservation of



wilderness areas is not extensive. Therefore, if it is the objective of the bill to provide for a commission whose membership is experienced, we do not believe that the designation of the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution would necessarily accomplish this purpose.

Mr. Scoyen has told me about the conversations he has had with you, Dave Brewer, Dick Leonard, Dr. Bradley, George Marshall, and others over a period of several years relative to the problems of wilderness protection in the national parks. I have instructed him to explore the possibilities of setting up procedures which will guide our operations so that the wilderness preservation groups will feel that their interests are better protected. However, I do feel that many of those so interested do not realize the extent to which no further encroachment on the primeval wilderness is the overriding policy of this Service. I think the record of the past 25 years supports this statement. Even with the \$725,000,000 program of REVISION 66, we are proposing virtually no new roads or opening of new developed areas.

Summed up, I feel that the national parks and some of the national monuments are the supreme wilderness regions of the Nation. Ever since the Yellowstone Act of 86 years ago provided for the retention of the wonders there, " \* \* \* in their natural condition" the objective has been clear and definite. It was re-emphasized in the Act of 1916 establishing the Service. Therefore, I hope you will appreciate the fact that we view with some apprehension any proposed law which will deal with our fundamental objectives and policy. What we have now can hardly be improved upon.

Sincerely yours,

(SGD) CONRAD L. WIRTH

Director

Copy to: Mr. David B. Brewer  
 Mr. Charles S. Woodbury  
 Mr. Scoyen  
 Mr. Allen  
 Mr. Harrison  
 Linda

FEHarrison:KTS:lt 3/13/96