

A Case for Conservation



Alene N. Case

The coolness of this morning reminds me that summer has passed once again (unofficially, at least). Remember those "themes" we used to write the first day back to school? They were always the same topic—What I Did On My Summer Vacation. Well, what did you do? My guess is that many of us spent at least a part of our summer enjoying the beauty of one of our national parks, refuges, or historic sites. Or, perhaps you visited one of Canada's parks or wilderness areas. Maybe you were really adventuresome and traveled to Europe or South America and there enjoyed exotic national parks in another part of the world. Or maybe you just stayed home and read about these wonderful places in *National Geographic*. Since the creation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872, the United States has led the world in setting apart such places and protecting them. Now, we seem to be leading in another direction—our national parks are facing assaults from all sides.

Let's first consider the statement of purpose of the U.S. National Park Service: "The National Park Service is dedicated to conserving unimpaired the natural and cultural resources of the nation's parklands, and through a variety of national and international programs, extending the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation to people throughout the country and the world." In technical terms, that translates into preserving 369 units so that plants and animals will be able to live there in the future and that our children and grandchildren will be able to experience them as we do now. This is indeed a lofty goal. Let's now consider some of the very real problems facing park managers as they try to carry out their (our) mission.

The challenge that has gotten the most "press" lately is the overcrowding problem. When more

Our National Parks: Treasures in trouble

than three million people visit Yellowstone in a five-month season, that's approximately 20,000 people per day. Now, some of these people will stay more than one day. Simply maintaining parking, toilet, and camping facilities for all those folks becomes a daunting task. Add to that traffic control, trail maintenance, and interpretive functions and there are relatively few resources remaining for the work of nature protection. Conserving nature "unimpaired" is much more difficult when hordes of people gather to view it. But, that is the challenge.

Unfortunately, the most severe environmental problems impacting our parks today are not those caused by visitors. If park rangers only had to worry about garbage pick-up, exhaust from RVs, and tourists feeding animals or trampling orchids, they could probably manage quite nicely. But, many of our parks are experiencing major problems that originate outside the park area. Two or three examples will illustrate my point.

The visibility in the Shenandoah Park in Virginia now averages 12 miles. Most people agree that it used to be common to see 30 miles from the Skyline Drive along the Blue Ridge. In fact, the Federal Aviation Administration has been keeping records for pilots flying over the mountains since 1948 and they have documented an average 60% decline in visibility during that time. The poor air quality is not only causing tourists to be disgruntled, but it also stresses plants which then become susceptible to insect infestation and other diseases. How is the park superintendent supposed to deal with pollution that originates in our nation's capital and surrounding metropolitan areas?

An even more blatant example is that of the Everglades in Florida. While the park service has been trying to protect the natural resources of this huge wetland area, the Army Corps of Engineers (ironically, another federal agency!) has been systematically depriving it of fresh water. Now the state of Florida and the Army Corps are trying to figure out how to return water to the wetland and still provide enough water for the millions of people who have moved into the areas that have been drained.

Parks all over the world face the problem of poaching. There are people who profit by selling illegally obtained animals and animal parts. And, as one of Canada's rangers put it, "national parks are a supermarket of major trophy heads. We grow them protected and we grow them big." Many bears are killed merely for their gall bladders which are prized in Asia for their medicinal properties. All of us can assist in the fight against poaching—we can report suspicious activities to the authorities and we can refuse to purchase items made from wild animal parts.

And, all parks require maintenance. The infrastructure of many of our older parks was built during the Depression by various government work projects such as the CCC and the WPA. The work was good, but many of the roads, bridges, and trails now need repair or replacement. Most parks depend on volunteer efforts to do this and those efforts are not keeping pace with the needs.

At the very time that our national parks are facing such difficulties, our new Congress is quietly undermining this important institution. There are bills now before the House or Senate or in Conference Committee to 1) create a parks closure commission, 2) stop all funding for the Mojave National Preserve - one of our newest parks 3) increase subsidies and monopolies for park concessionaires, 4) turn parks over to the states - which may not have the resources to protect them, 5) make it easier to build roads through our national parks and wilderness areas 6) cut or eliminate all funding for land acquisition within our existing parks and, in some cases, to prevent individuals or non-profit organizations from donating such land to the park service. These and other provisions are hidden in a wide variety of appropriations bills and appended onto other legislation and are, therefore, difficult to track. I recommend that we all contact our legislators and let them know that we agree with at least 80% of our fellow Americans who feel that our parks deserve at least as much protection as they are now getting. We owe it to those who will want to visit national parks in future summers.

J.W.J.



John W. Johnson

Recently, baseball icon Mickey Mantle, and rock and roll legend, Jerry Garcia died. And while the death certificates will say cancer and heart attack, both men killed themselves with alcohol, in Mantle's case and drugs for Garcia. Hardly something to eulogize or emulate. Why do we do this? Why do we make heroes of irresponsible persons? Is it because we know of our own vulnerabilities, and that, but for one or two bumps in the road, many of us would be as self-destructive? The death of any human is sad; more so, when those persons are gifted and those gifts silenced prematurely. And just as we should always remember and tell our children of their exploits, it would be purely to retain our own veneer of invincibility were we to fail telling our children that they also died too young, and by their own hand.

Even if it's only the O.J. case verbal jousting, designed to destroy ideas and create images, we nonetheless seek out the carnage because we are a violent species. As we decry the O.J. spectacle; we cling to the emotions it conjures. And even as we delude ourselves through the arts and other activities about our higher motivations, hoping against hope that our more base instincts will not prevail, we nonetheless, are drawn to the spectacle, seeking to, even vicariously, touch the darkness upon and through which the spectacle's light shines into our very soul. More's the pity. Certain the reality.

Those seeking term limits for state and federally elected officials say that the beginning of the end of the government by, of, and for the people roughly coincides

More notes from all over

with the beginning of the so-called "Great Society" programs of 1965. It was then that state legislatures began—and because of all the rules and regulations which came with the federal money—to become full-time, rather than part-time governing bodies. This resulted in full-time politicians, always running for re-election rather than part-time public servants. However, those seeking term limits perhaps are missing the obvious. Political power—as does water in nature—seeks its own level.

For those of you concerned about you or your children contracting Lyme disease, here's something else to worry about. The American dog tick has expanded across Pennsylvania over the past decade, and from 2 to 10 per cent of these ticks carry Rocky Mountain spotted fever. Three to four days after being bitten by such a tick, a person may experience high fever, headache, sore muscles and fatigue, followed by

a severe rash with white or purple spots. The disease is easily treated with antibiotics. Left untreated, it can be fatal, especially to young children.

As the new Congress ponders ways to make government more fiscally sound, many don't want to hear about cutting the budget for public television. The reality is that public television—contrary to the nauseating and seemingly constant fund raisers—is not primarily supported by viewers; it is primarily supported by tax dollars. As such, it is welfare for the elite, as much of the programming aims for better educated, less mainstream, Americans. Among these PBS shows which receive public subsidy is the much revered *Sesame Street*—even though Big Bird and his buddies have earned millions and millions of his creators, it still receives public subsidy. And there's something very and inherently wrong with that.

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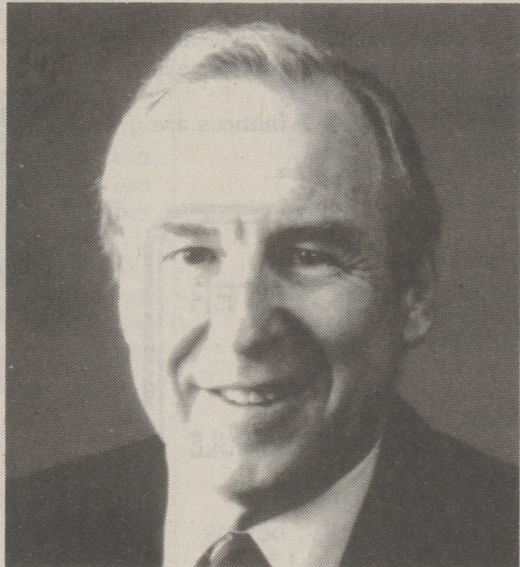
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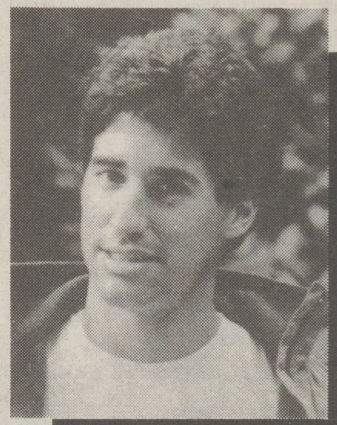
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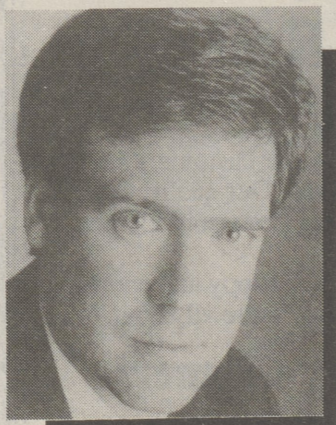
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Tues., Oct. 10
David Brown
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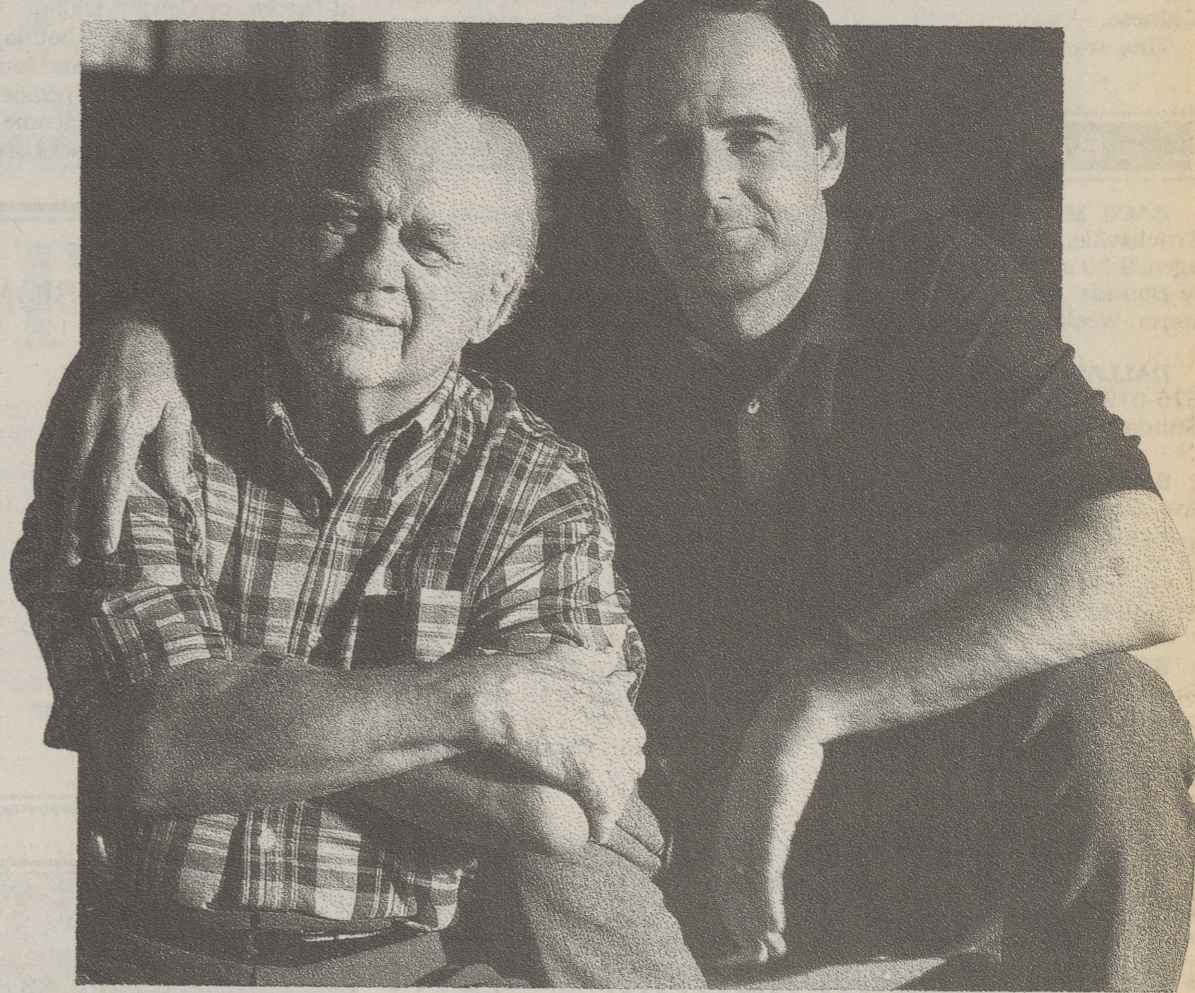


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