

A Context for Human Ecology*Theodore W. Sudia*

Yellowstone National Park was created by an act of Congress in 1872 after its discoverers, following the lead of Thomas Hedges, renounced private claims to the land in order that it might be enjoyed by all Americans. Not only is this "good piece of geography" a superb physical and biological landscape, but it embodies the superlative concept of "National Park".

The Oxford dictionary, based upon historical usage, defines national park as "an extensive area of land set apart as national property to be kept in its natural state for the public benefit, as the Yellowstone National Park, 1872". This is the first time the term national park appears in the English language. Two important landmark entities came into being with the Yellowstone Act of 1872, one was the park itself, a vast Rocky Mountain wilderness, the other was the *concept* that the wilderness in its natural state is of benefit to the public.

Many individual park acts were passed before the Congress passed the National Park Service Act of 1916. While each new act of Congress added something to the National Park process, this pre-1916 legislation added little to the basic concept that national parks were to be pleasuring grounds and that the benefits to be derived from these pleasuring grounds were to be found in the unaltered state of nature in which these parks in general and Yellowstone in particular were found.

The Act of 1916 added to the concept of parks the important dimension of requiring that they be maintained unimpaired for the benefit of future generations—that is to say, in perpetuity.

Ronnie Lee in his *Family Tree of the National Parks* follows the legal geneology of the different kinds of parks found today in the National Park System and, in the process, describes an infant country memorializing its accomplishments almost as quickly as they happen. General Richard Montgomery's heroic death at Quebec during the Revolution, commemorated in a statue that can be seen today in St. Paul's Chapel in New York, was paid for by the Continental Congress. The Continental Congress also authorized the statue of George Washington that stands in Washington Circle on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D. C. The National Capitol Region of the National Park Service in reality came into existence with the creation of the city of Washington in 1790, just three years after the Constitution itself was adopted. Nearly a hundred years elapsed before the Yellowstone Act of 1872, but a glance at the history books will show a nation that, even after a century, was just getting itself fitted to the continent. In rapid succession after 1872 many of the greatest parks of the System were added. The Antiquities Act of 1906 added a new dimension to the system and in 1916 it was time to bring it all together through the National Park Service Act into one National Park Service.

The burst of enlightenment that emerges from this park history, is that the great wilderness pleasuring grounds, kept unimpaired for future generations, were established truly for the benefit of the people. They are not places to come merely to express one's first amendment rights; they are places to come to learn what an unspoiled landscape can tell those who listen and show those who take the trouble to look. That the framers of the Yellowstone act regard nature so highly (when the chief pursuit of the nation was to subdue the wilderness to commercial and private uses), suggests the highest morality.

This exalted ethical concept obviously is not an isolated trail of enlightenment through the uncertain youth of this nation and its early development as a truly modern democratic state. The clarion call for all mankind was sounded in the Declaration of Independence when Thomas Jefferson declared that "All men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness". This text encapsulated the great thesis, the genetic *raison d'être* for the establishment of our government. While this fact is little understood and not widely noted, Jefferson affirmed as much in the next sentence of the Declaration when he stated, "That to secure these rights Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

The "all men are created equal" concept arises in the Constitution in the Preamble, where the framers say, "We the people of the United States in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." What better analog could the framers have suggested to pursuit of happiness than "domestic tranquility"?

Taken together then, we have four penetrating concepts, with the highest of ethical and moral connotations: the "pursuit of happiness" concept from the Declaration of Independence; "domestic tranquility" from the Preamble to the Constitution; the "wilderness pleasuring ground" maintained in its natural state, in the Yellowstone legislation, and "parks maintained unimpaired for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations" from the National Park Act of 1916. Taking all four together we have the basis for the establishment, growth, enhancement, protection, and preservation of the National Heritage.

Insofar as our national growth and development have been true to these concepts, they have been an outgrowth of the very genetics--the "seed instructions"--laid down by the founding fathers at the nation's conception and birth.

The concepts nest, ecologically. Pursuit of happiness relates to individuals, domestic tranquility relates to communities and the

pleasuring grounds in their natural state relates to the environment. Governments are instituted among men to establish unalienable rights, in viable communities, guided by an environmental ethic.

An examination of the present departments of the Federal Government reveals that the Judiciary and the Justice Department speak to the question of the establishment of Justice as specified in the Constitution's Preamble. The Department of Defense covers the common defense clause; Health and Human Services and the Commerce Departments cover the General Welfare. The flaw in our human ecology fabric appears at this point: what if any department relates to Domestic Tranquility? There appears to be none, although scattered among various agencies, bureaus and offices there are bits and pieces of government that DO relate to that vital concept.

The National Park Service springs to mind as the bureau of government that comes closest to relating to this neglected area. The Service covers nearly every aspect of our cultural life: outdoor recreation—urban and rural, the arts, theater, history, archeology, anthropology, National Parks representing the natural heritage, Historical Parks and sites representing the cultural heritage. There are other bureaus and offices that relate to the domestic tranquility, but not with the same depth, scope, and tradition as the Park Service.

I would argue, therefore, that Ronnie Lee's concept of the Family Tree of the National Park Service, while perfectly adequate in attributing the origins of the National Park Service to the founding of the City of Washington in 1790, the enactment of the Yellowstone Act in 1872, the Antiquities Act of 1906 and the Organic Act of 1916, really extends to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution itself. In a perfectly reasonable way the actions that established the first National Park in the world came from an experiment in government that is unparalleled in the world. Our Declaration of Independence, our Constitution and our National Park System are America's unique contribution to the heritage of the world. □