

A Reply to William O. Fink

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AT THE RISK OF CONTINUING TO TRADE INK with Mr. Fink I will add a few comments to my letter to him dated December 15, 1994. By and large, I think my letter speaks for itself. I had and still have serious concerns as to the eventual costs associated with the Keweenaw site.

My prediction—then and now—was that the federal government would be pulled, inch by inch, dollar by dollar, into environmental clean-up and very costly historic preservation projects. During the “inside the beltway” discussions, the concerns over preserving many of the lovely old buildings and homes in Calumet was a major point. I don’t have to describe the potential costs for such a project to park people. They are enormous.

As to Mr. Fink’s argument that the NPS has “a good procedure for assuring the integrity and worth of new units of the System,” I would have serious doubt. My experience was that the most glowing reports could be made on most any project, if a sympathetic park planner had the pen in hand. To put it bluntly, our own park planners are occasionally our worst enemies. Too many park planners respond as if they are the lap puppies of local congressional representatives rather than employees of the National Park Service with a serious mandate to protect.

I have no objection to a park site being a local draw for economic development and tourism and would agree with Mr. Fink on this issue. Economic development and tourism must not be the primary objective, which would appear to be the situation at Steamtown. I don’t object to Steamtown as an economic development project. I think it is a good one.

If the Congress wants to pay for such projects, that is their prerogative—but the payment should not come out of the hide of national parks. It burns me up to have members of Congress brag that they have met the budgetary requirements of the parks. They may meet or exceed the number of dollars requested, but the priorities are usually shifted dramatically. These disparities almost always show up in capital construction or land acquisition.

As to Mr. Fink’s point that there are longer mine shafts in the area than I mentioned in my book, I stand guilty as accused.

