

Centennial Essay Feedback

a selection of comments received in response to the previous Centennial Essay

Comments on “Robin Winks on the Evolution and Meaning of the Organic Act,” (volume 24, no. 3, December 2007; online at www.georgewright.org/243winks.pdf)

After reading Winks’ remarkable essay, it reminded me of a similar “debate” that started in 1964 with the passage of the Wilderness Act (Public Law 88-577). Some people argued that this act sent a “dual” message to the American people about how these newly created wilderness areas were to be used/enjoyed. Section 2(a) of the act states that these wilderness areas “shall be administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, and so as to provide for . . . the preservation of their wilderness character.” Though it should be very apparent that Congress wanted to, above all, protect the “wilderness character” of these protected areas, some cynical people asked, “When does the wilderness character of an area become jeopardized?” Does a fire ring affect wilderness character? Does a group of 40 backpackers jeopardize wilderness character?

Winks’ essay appropriately concludes that the “intent” of Congress in passing this legislation was “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife” within the national parks. Providing for the enjoyment of Americans must come second in this instance.

One lasting impression that Winks’ essay had on me was for me to question the future of all our protected public lands in America. Will the threats of global warming, Big Oil, and an ever-increasing population lead to the ultimate destruction of all protected areas within the USA? Will even the staunchest environmentalists be able to stand up for pristine lands, clean waterways, and innocent wildlife in the face of overwhelming pressure?

— *Paul Markowski*

A long time ago, I proposed to dedicate the NPS Southwest Region’s Columbus Quintennial to physical improvements and maintenance of the areas themselves, rather than hoopla events. We would provide the improved stage for events carried out by local people. We would not do the events; our local friends and supporters would. That put the momentum behind hard-core physical upkeep, and much local involvement and participation. It was a direct benefit to the areas rather than a “Special Event” drain on overloaded park staffs. It was therefore a success with many before-and-after showcase projects that didn’t cost a lot but cleaned up lots of messes and deferrals. I still think this is a good approach.

— *Bill Brown*