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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT DIVISION



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B-148736

The Honorable Cecil D. Andrus
The Secretary of the Interior



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Dear Mr. Secretary:

We have completed our review of the National Park Service's urban national recreation area program. We directed our review primarily toward the first three areas to be designated by the Congress. These are Golden Gate, ¹⁸⁵¹ near San Francisco, California; Gateway in the harbor area ¹⁸⁵² of New York City, New York; and Cuyahoga Valley, ¹⁸⁵³ near Cleveland and Akron, Ohio. We made the review to assess whether the program was meeting its objectives of providing recreational needs of urban populations and protecting and preserving significant natural and scenic settings near large cities.

In summary, the three areas we reviewed were providing recreation for many urban residents. Also, the natural and scenic settings of the areas were being protected and preserved. However, low-income, inner-city residents were not using the areas very often, and Federal costs could increase considerably if all the lands within the recreation areas that are now owned and protected by State and local governments were to be donated to the Secretary. These matters are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

At each of the three areas, we examined the recreation and preservation efforts and goals. At the Park Service's Washington, D.C., headquarters and its North Atlantic and Western regional offices, we evaluated the Service's plans, policies, procedures, and practices relating to urban national recreation areas. We also reviewed various data and studies; interviewed State and city recreation officials and representatives of community groups about the recreation needs of five inner-city neighborhoods in San Francisco, Oakland, and New York City; and obtained information from Interior's Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Army Corps of Engineers. We discussed this report with National Park Service officials, who generally agreed with the matters included herein.

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MEETING THE RECREATION NEEDS
OF URBAN RESIDENTS

Although heavily used as recreation sites, the three areas were not being used very often by transit-dependent, low-income, inner-city residents who, according to several observers, need recreational opportunities the most. Most visitors came from the surrounding affluent communities.

According to city park and recreation officials and community organization representatives we interviewed in San Francisco, Oakland, and New York, most residents of transit-dependent, low-income neighborhoods do not use the urban national recreation areas because the areas are generally inaccessible to them. They also said that inner-city residents generally have a greater desire for close-to-home neighborhood parks and facilities.

Location of recreation areas limits
their use by inner-city residents

Park and recreation department officials in San Francisco and Oakland told us that a combination of neighborhood and regional parks is important. They said, however, that regional parks such as Golden Gate are not readily accessible to inner-city residents.

Community organization representatives in the three inner-city San Francisco and Oakland neighborhoods we visited told us that recreation opportunities are most needed within the neighborhoods. Representatives of the Oakland community organization said that its residents were not knowledgeable about Golden Gate or its programs and that a number of closer regional parks offered more recreational activities, as well as open space similar to that available at Golden Gate. Representatives of two San Francisco community organizations said that their residents knew about Golden Gate but were critical of its available recreational activities. They believed that Golden Gate needed to provide more intensive recreational activities, such as swimming, picnicking, and softball, in order to attract low-income residents.

Park and recreation officials and community planning board members in the two inner-city neighborhoods we visited in New York City identified close-to-home facilities as the most critical recreation need. In their opinion, Gateway will not meet this need because the cost in time and money necessary to reach it is too great an investment for inner-city residents. For example, a family of four in New York's Morrisania and Brownsville neighborhoods would spend \$8 (\$6 on Sundays) for a round trip to Gateway, and the trip--would

involve transferring between subway lines and switching to a bus. On a weekend, the round trip would take 5 hours from Morrisania and 2-3/4 hours from Brownsville.

At Cuyahoga Valley, there was no round trip public transit service from Akron. A round trip from Cleveland's inner-city neighborhoods to the recreation area's Brecksville unit would take about 1 hour and cost \$2.80 for a family of four.

Pilot program to improve transportation service has been authorized

Near the completion of our fieldwork, the Congress took action to improve transportation access to urban national recreation areas and to other units of the national park system.

Title III of Public Law 95-344 (92 Stat. 477), approved August 15, 1978, authorized a pilot transportation program to be carried out by the Secretary of the Interior to encourage "the use of transportation modes other than personal motor vehicles for access to and within units of the National Park System * * *." The principal objective of this legislation is to reduce the reliance on automobiles for park access. Senator Harrison Williams, who sponsored the legislation, cited several reasons for promoting transportation alternatives to the automobile. In addition to mentioning reduced traffic congestion and environmental considerations, he said

"People who do not have cars--particularly the poor, the elderly, the young, and the handicapped--are * * * denied the opportunity to enjoy their country's natural splendors."

The act authorizes appropriations, which are to remain available until expended, of \$1 million for fiscal year 1979, \$2 million for 1980, and \$3 million for 1981.

The National Park Service evaluated 53 proposals submitted by its regional offices for fiscal year 1979. In February 1979 the Service's Director approved 24 transportation improvement projects totaling about \$800,000 and initiated a formal reprogramming request through Interior and the Office of Management and Budget to finance these projects. Eight projects totaling \$317,000 were for the Golden Gate, Gateway, and Cuyahoga Valley national recreation areas. Most of the 24 approved projects provide for the Park Service to participate in cost-sharing arrangements whereby carriers

would extend public transit service into the parks and the Park Service would pay a part of the carriers' deficits. Additional projects are for public education efforts and shuttle services between park areas and existing public transit stops.

As of May 1979 the Service was starting to develop a methodology to study the results of the program and, at the end of 3 years, it plans to submit an overall evaluation to the Congress, as required by the legislation. As part of the evaluation, the Service should assess the extent to which the transportation improvement projects increase the use of the urban national recreation areas by low-income, inner-city residents and the per capita costs of such increases. The results of this assessment should show whether transportation improvements help in furthering the objectives of the urban national recreation areas and the desirability of continuing further efforts aimed at transporting people to these areas.

Program to help cities provide close-to-home recreation has been authorized

In regard to inner-city residents' need for close-to-home recreation, the Congress enacted a 5-year, \$726 million Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program on November 10, 1978, as Title X of Public Law 95-625 (92 Stat. 3538). This title authorizes the Secretary to establish a program of

"Federal grants to economically hard-pressed communities specifically for the rehabilitation of critically needed recreation areas, facilities, and development of improved recreation programs
* * *."

Funds available under this title cannot be used to acquire land or interests in land.

This program is intended to complement certain existing programs by encouraging and stimulating local governments to revitalize their park and recreation systems and to make long-term commitments to continuing maintenance of these systems. Emphasis is to be on public facilities readily accessible to residential neighborhoods. One of the factors to be considered in establishing priority criteria for project selection and approval is

"* * *demonstrated deficiencies in access to neighborhood recreation opportunities,

particularly for minority, and low- and moderate-income residents."

Within 90 days after the authority for this program expires, the Secretary is to report to the Congress on the program's overall impact. Interior has requested a supplemental appropriation of \$37.5 million for fiscal year 1979 to initiate the program. The President's fiscal year 1980 budget includes \$150 million for the program.

Conclusions

The first three urban national recreation areas created under the concept of "bringing parks closer to the people" are providing recreational opportunities to many urban dwellers. However, residents of most low-income communities find the access to recreation areas difficult and express a greater interest in close-to-home neighborhood recreation facilities.

The transportation improvement program authorized by Public Law 95-344 is intended, in part, to improve access for people who do not have cars--particularly the poor, elderly, young, and handicapped. The evaluation of this program should include an assessment of whether the transportation improvement projects significantly increase the use of the national urban recreation areas by low-income, inner-city residents.

Recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior

We recommend that the Secretary have the National Park Service include in its evaluation of the transportation improvement program an assessment of the extent to which the projects involving the urban national recreation areas increase the use of these areas by low-income, inner-city residents and the per capita costs of such increases.

THE SECRETARY SHOULD ENCOURAGE CONTINUED STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP OF LANDS

Although State and local governments have donated to the Secretary about half the lands they owned within the three recreation areas, they continue to own and protect

the natural character of the remainder. While the laws 1/ creating these areas provide that all State- and local government-owned lands within the areas can be donated to the Secretary, the laws allow the Secretary to encourage States and local jurisdictions to retain lands whose natural character is being adequately preserved. We believe that the Secretary should seek to have the State and local governments retain and protect as much as possible of the remaining lands they own within the three areas.

In legislation creating several additional recreation areas and other national park units in 1978, the Congress supported this concept, recognizing it as a way to achieve adequate preservation of the natural character of such areas with less Federal cost and land ownership. Interior is also studying several approaches to achieve a Federal/State/local partnership in preserving and protecting additional urban open space areas in the future.

Donations of State- and local government-owned lands within the three recreation areas

Of the total of about 97,300 acres authorized to be acquired for the three areas--38,600 for Golden Gate, 26,200 for Gateway, and 32,500 for Cuyahoga Valley--about 44,600 acres were owned by State and local governments. The remaining lands were under military ownership or privately owned.

As of December 1978 State and local governments had donated to the Secretary about 21,500 acres within the three areas. The remaining 23,100 acres State and local governments owned had not yet been transferred. According to State and local government officials, future financial problems may force local jurisdictions to consider donating additional amounts of these lands to the Secretary. Although it is uncertain when and how much of these remaining lands will be donated, Park Service officials said that all such lands will be accepted as they become available.

Park Service officials told us that local jurisdictions are generally doing a good job in managing resources within the urban national recreation areas and the management is consistent with Park Service land-use plans. The officials agreed that the Park Service should seek continued State and

1/Public Law 92-592 created Gateway; Public Law 92-589 created Golden Gate; and Public Law 93-555 created Cuyahoga Valley.

local government management provided (1) the parks are managed to serve a national or regional constituency and (2) the lands are managed according to comparable standards maintained in the national park system.

State and local government officials generally indicated that if sufficient Federal aid were provided when needed, local governments would be willing to continue local ownership and protection of most of the lands they currently hold in the three areas. The Secretary should encourage continued local protection of lands within the first three urban national recreation areas. The large amounts of land retained indicate that local jurisdictions may be willing to enter into a partnership with the Secretary to assure continued local protection of lands. Greater State and local participation results in shared land management responsibilities and costs. This approach could achieve the congressional objectives of resource protection and preservation with less Federal cost and land ownership.

Examples of State, regional, and local parks operating within the boundaries of the three areas and their status for possible donation or retention follow.

Golden Gate

Within the Golden Gate area, California has retained the 6,200-acre Mount Tamalpais State Park and the 746-acre Angel Island State Park. However, California State park and recreation officials told us that the State may be forced to consider donating these properties if proposition 13 forces future budget cuts for recreation. They said the State had not yet transferred the parks to the Secretary because the State (1) intends to maintain an urban recreation presence and (2) is doing a good job managing the parks so there is no need to transfer ownership.

The Park Service's preliminary Golden Gate land-use plan calls for Mount Tamalpais to be managed essentially the same as the State is presently managing it. Angel Island, however, would be used less for recreation than the State plans. Golden Gate officials were satisfied with the State's management of both parks.

Also, San Francisco has kept the 74-acre Marina Green City Park, which includes two yacht clubs and an adjoining marina. Golden Gate reports that the park will continue under city jurisdiction for about 5 years, at which time the city will consider transferring it to Federal ownership.

Preliminary land-use plans call for continued operation of the two yacht harbors. San Francisco recreation officials said that the city has not donated the park because it generates harbor revenues needed to pay off loans from the State.

Gateway

Within Gateway, New York City has retained four Staten Island beaches, totaling 272 acres of land and 568 acres of water. According to a Park Service official, a State representative has indicated that he would sponsor legislation in the State legislature to authorize conveyance of this property when the Park Service can demonstrate a need for the beaches and when the type and extent of development of these areas are known.

Community opposition exists to the transfer of these beaches, which are used principally by local residents, because of concern about increased traffic on already congested roads, fear of loss of local control, and uncertainty about Gateway development plans.

New York and New Jersey State park and recreation officials told us that local governments are effectively serving the local communities' recreation needs. New Jersey officials also indicated that the State would be willing to operate Gateway's Sandy Hook unit if given sufficient Federal aid.

Cuyahoga Valley

Within Cuyahoga Valley, the Akron and Cleveland metropolitan park districts currently own and administer six parks and other areas, totaling about 6,200 acres. The parks are in good condition and offer numerous recreational facilities and activities.

The park districts' officials told us that no decision had been made on transferring these parklands to the Secretary. They said that sufficient financial resources are available through tax levies to continue managing them. They pointed out, however, that the possibility of future financial problems exists, and that if such problems occurred, the park districts would likely consider donating lands to the Secretary as one alternative to reduce costs. The officials also said they feared voters would resent local governments' turning over their lands to the Federal Government.

If the parks were donated, the Park Service would manage them in basically the same manner as they currently are operated. Their donation, however, would result in a substantial increase in Park Service operating costs. Information provided by the Cleveland metropolitan park district, for example, showed that the operating costs for its Brecksville and Bedford parks would be about \$730,000 in fiscal year 1979. Also, the Akron metropolitan park district estimated that up to 10 percent, or \$80,000, of its current operating budget was devoted to operating the four parks it retains within Cuyahoga Valley.

Greater State and local participation
sought in protecting new park areas

The Congress and Interior are currently examining ways to achieve a Federal/State/local partnership to conserve additional open space areas within urban communities. The Secretary should take this opportunity to work with State and local governments for continued local ownership and protection of lands in the first three urban national recreation areas.

In his March 1978 Urban Policy Proposal to the Congress, President Carter said

"The quality of life in urban areas is critically affected by the availability of open spaces and recreation facilities. Yet hard-pressed communities often lack the resources to maintain and invest adequately in these amenities * * *. But I believe that a New Partnership--bringing together in a common effort all who have a stake in the future of our communities--can bring us closer to our long-term goals."

Also, in June 1978 hearings before the Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources the Under Secretary of the Interior testified that

"* * * the Department agrees that full fee acquisition of all future parks is financially impractical, and we therefore support with enthusiasm alternatives that work toward the most cost-effective mix of acquisition and * * * land use control mechanisms by whatever level of government is best able to do the job."

The Director of the National Park Service has also advocated greater Federal, State, and local coordination. In a fall 1978 Park Service publication, 1/ he said that "There should be more coordination between the various levels of government" and that "More use should be made of joint venture and cooperative arrangements * * *."

Interior is currently studying several alternative approaches to landscape protection through which the Federal Government can offer incentives to State, regional, and local entities to prepare and implement strategies to protect outstanding natural resource areas. One approach, called Areas of National Concern, envisions targeting Federal funds--either through grants provided by separate legislation or through existing Federal recreation assistance programs, such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund--to help economically depressed communities conserve significant open space areas.

In the November 1978 legislation (92 Stat. 3492-98) establishing the Pinelands National Reserve in New Jersey, the Congress embodied the principles of the Areas of National Concern approach. The legislation directs the Secretary to assist in the organization of a State, local, and private planning entity to develop a comprehensive plan for public and private management of the reserve. The plan is to include a coordination and consistency component detailing (1) the ways in which local, State, and Federal programs and policies may best be coordinated to promote the plan's goals and policies and (2) how land, water, and structures managed by governmental and nongovernmental entities within the area may be integrated into the plan.

Of the \$26 million authorized, not more than \$3 million was to be available for planning, with the remainder available for land acquisition. The State of New Jersey and local governments will manage the acquired lands.

Other recent legislation which gives State and local governments continued preservation and management responsibilities in historic parks and recreation areas includes:

--Public Law 95-290 (92 Stat. 290, June 5, 1978), which established the Lowell National Historical Park in Lowell, Massachusetts.

1/"Trends," Fall 1978, Vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 2-5.

- Title IX of Public Law 95-625 (92 Stat. 3534-38), which authorized establishment of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve in Louisiana.
- Section 507 of Public Law 95-625 (92 Stat. 3501-07), which established the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area near Los Angeles, California.
- Title I of Public Law 95-344 (92 Stat. 474, Aug. 15, 1978), which established the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area near Atlanta, Georgia.

Under these laws, State and local governments have continuing preservation and management responsibilities for certain park areas, while the Park Service will acquire and develop other areas.

Conclusions

In view of the interest expressed by the President, the Congress, and Interior in achieving resource protection with less Federal cost through greater cooperation with State and local governments, the Secretary should consider greater use of his discretionary legislative authority of choosing to accept State- and local government-owned lands in the Golden Gate, Gateway, and Cuyahoga Valley national recreational areas. The Secretary should consider whether the State or local governments have the financial capability and willingness to manage the lands adequately and if preservation objectives can be achieved by supporting continued State or local government management with Federal assistance.

Recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior

We recommend that the Secretary assess whether the State and local governments that own lands within the Golden Gate, Gateway, and Cuyahoga Valley national recreation areas have sufficient financial capability and willingness to protect and manage the lands adequately and, if so, encourage the governments to retain ownership of such lands.

To achieve shared land management responsibilities with less Federal cost and land ownership, we recommend also that the Secretary determine the following:

- Could existing Federal programs--such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund program, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act program, and mass

transit programs--be targeted to provide financial support to local governments to address existing problems related to the urban national recreation areas?

--Would changes in legislation be desirable to accomplish the recreation areas' objectives without Federal land ownership? For example, Federal funds could be provided for special purposes (such as, beach stabilization) or in those cases where Federal matching grants are limited to a certain percentage of costs, which would reduce the State or local matching fund requirement.

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Section 236 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 requires the head of a Federal agency to submit a written statement on actions taken on our recommendations to the House Committee on Government Operations and the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs not later than 60 days after the date of the report and to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report.

We are sending copies of this report to the above committees; the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources; the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; and your Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks; Director, National Park Service; and Inspector General.

Sincerely yours,



Henry Eschwege
Director