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## Our National Parks: Assumptions, Metaphors and Policy Implications

Paul C. Pritchard\*

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## OUR NATIONAL PARKS: ASSUMPTIONS, METAPHORS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

*Paul C. Pritchard\**

According to *Webster's Dictionary*, an assumption is something "take[n] for granted" or "accepted arbitrarily."<sup>1</sup> Webster's also defines assumption as "arrogance."<sup>2</sup> While science, economics, anthropology, and many other intellectual tools aid us as we develop policies, none of these has as great an influence on policy as our assumptions. This truth is at the core of our discussion today and it is up to us to understand how our assumptions shape public policy.

It is also our responsibility to use this understanding to become better stewards of this nation's heritage. For decades, we have based our policies on controversial and divisive assumptions. From the early rift between conservationist Gifford Pinchot and preservationist John Muir<sup>3</sup> to the current debate surrounding the future of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge,<sup>4</sup> Southern Utah's Escalante National Monument,<sup>5</sup> and all of our national lands, our policies have been shaped more by assumptions or "arrogance" than by facts.

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\* Paul Pritchard is the former Director of the National Parks and Conservation Association. Mr. Pritchard gave the Keynote Address at the Spring 1997 Environmental Law Journal Symposium at Fordham University School of Law.

1. WEBSTER'S THIRD NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY 133 (1986).

2. *Id.*

3. See JOHN MILES, GUARDIANS OF THE PARKS: A HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL PARKS AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION 9 (1995).

4. See Jimmy Carter, *Save Alaska—Again*, N.Y. TIMES, May 18, 1995, at A23; see also *infra* text accompanying notes 13-14.

5. See Jim Carrier, *The Last Place*, DENV. POST, Nov. 17, 1996, at 19, available in 1996 WL 12636781.

I stand before you today as one who has spent the last twenty-five years working on national park policy. I am not an attorney; I am a natural resources economist and an environmental activist. Fordham University has invited me to deliver this keynote address today, not because of my expertise in natural resource law, but because I can bear witness to the significant trends, swings, and even complete reversals in the way Congress and four Presidential Administrations have treated our national parks.

There are perhaps two ways of viewing the relationship between our assumptions and recent developments in natural resource policy. The first approach is to examine a series of specific areas, as our panelists will do today, and the second approach is to focus on a single area and extract as much meaning from it as possible. Today, I will choose the second.

I would like to begin by briefly discussing the state of two units of our national park system that are suffering through their anniversaries during these few weeks in late winter. Exactly 102 years ago, Gettysburg National Military Park was established to commemorate the most important battle ever fought on our nation's soil. Today, Gettysburg reminds us of our past and inspires us to hope and work for a future that will never again see our nation divided against itself. Despite its significance, Gettysburg National Military Park has been consistently and increasingly threatened by commercial and residential developments, poorly planned economic growth, and burgeoning human traffic.<sup>6</sup>

This erosion of our heritage has been fueled by an assumption that development, no matter how misguided or destructive, is progress and therefore inherently good and universally desirable. We are a nation that values short-term economic growth more than we value the lessons learned from our past, or the legacy we leave to the future. Many of our significant Civil War sites have been lost to this assumption and all are threatened by it.<sup>7</sup>

Yellowstone National Park also bears the scars of our nation's shabby treatment of its public resources. On March first of this year, just a few weeks from today, we will mark the passing of Yellowstone National Park's one-hundred twenty-fifth anniversary. But the millions of Americans who love Yellowstone's famed American Buffalo will have little to celebrate. Since the first of

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6. See NATIONAL PARKS & CONSERVATION ASS'N, OUR ENDANGERED PARKS 59-60 (1994).

7. See *id.* at 77.

January, 1997, over 900 of Yellowstone's buffalo — the last free-ranging herd in the world — have been gunned down, or captured and sent to slaughter.<sup>8</sup> As of mid-winter of this year, only 1,700 remained.<sup>9</sup> This slaughter has been driven by several assumptions, one of which is the assumption that a disease the buffalo carry can be transmitted to domestic cattle in the wild.<sup>10</sup> This has never been verified,<sup>11</sup> but it has cost nearly 1,000 of our nation's most treasured animals their lives.

Yellowstone's geysers and hotpots are also threatened by the assumption that geothermal wonders are more valuable as a commodity than as a timeless natural wonder. Yellowstone's pristine mountain waters and famous native trout are threatened by the assumption that subsidized gold mining is the highest and best use of the park's watershed. Yellowstone's grizzly bears are threatened by the assumption that our comfort-fixated society can no longer tolerate the wild and the fanged.<sup>12</sup>

I believe eight forces have driven America's management of national parks and other natural resources in recent years. By understanding these forces, we will better understand the causes of the crises in Yellowstone and elsewhere.

Chief among the forces driving public policy in the United States are the policy-makers in Congress. For an indication of the assumptions driving Congress, we need to look no further than the statements of two Alaskans: Senator Frank Murkowski, the Chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee, and Congressman Don Young, the Chairman of the House Resources Committee.

These are a few of the views expressed by the two members of Congress who control national park policy: It is "really the Arctic oil reserve. We don't call it [the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge]

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8. See Todd Wilkinson, *Last Stand for Bison Herd At Yellowstone National Park?*, CHRISTIAN SCI. MONITOR, Feb. 21, 1997, at 3, available in 1997 WL 2799443.

9. See Bison Distribution Flight aerial observation data from Mary Meager, Research Observer, to the National Park Service (Feb. 21, 1997) (copy on file with the *Fordham Environmental Law Journal*).

10. See M. Katherine Heinrich, *Yellowstone Buffalo Slaughtered in Record Numbers*, NAT'L PARKS, Mar./Apr. 1997, at 12-14.

11. See Todd Wilkinson, *No Home On the Range*, HIGH COUNTRY NEWS, Feb. 1997, at 2.

12. See Todd Wilkinson, *Global Warning*, NAT'L PARKS, Mar./Apr. 1996, at 36.

any more. It is a reserve, with a possible storehouse of oil the whole nation can share."<sup>13</sup> Senator Murkowski's assumptions are apparent here, but they are also in obvious conflict with fact. Senator Murkowski's fellow Alaskan, Congressman Don Young, is another policy maker with assumptions. "I don't believe government, unless it's a communist government, should own lands."<sup>14</sup>

A second policy-shaping force is the balanced budget mindset. As the current Congress takes up the Balanced Budget Amendment<sup>15</sup> again and policy-makers from both parties promise a balanced budget, parks and other federal conservation and environmental protection programs will continue to be under-funded because they are assumed to be discretionary.

Let us look at the consequences of a balanced budget mindset on research in the parks. One result of this funding shortfall is a lack of science-based management in our parks.<sup>16</sup> Clearly we cannot hope to protect our national parks if we do not adequately understand them. Despite this fact, the National Park Service's (NPS) research function has been decimated in recent years. In fact, during the last three years many Park Service researchers have been transferred to the National Biological Survey (NBS) in the interest of efficiency and increased effectiveness.<sup>17</sup> The results of these transfers have been quite the opposite. Indeed, a recent survey of NPS managers revealed the following:

- Before the transfer of NPS scientists to the NBS, forty-nine percent of managers had received scientific assistance "regularly."
- Since the transfer of NPS scientists to the NBS, only nineteen percent of managers reported receiving assistance from the

13. Wilderness Soc'y, *They Really Said It! Quotations of Chairmen Murkowski and Young* (visited Dec. 23, 1997) <<http://www.wilderness.org/wildalaska/specialreport.htm>> [hereinafter *They Really Said It!*]; see also Yereth Rosen, *Oil Debate in Alaska is All in a Name by Renaming the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge*, CHRISTIAN SCI. MONITOR, June 29, 1995, at 4, available in 1995 WL 6394629.

14. *They Really Said It!*, *supra* note 13.

15. H.R.J. Res. 7, 105th Cong. (1997). The 105th Congress considered but never passed the Balanced Budget Amendment.

16. See Jeff Phillips, *Can We Save Our National Parks?*, SUNSET, June 1, 1996, at 74, available in 1996 WL 9829013.

17. See Kevin Collins, *The National Parks and Conservation Association*, ENV'T, Apr. 1, 1997, at 44, available in 1997 WL 10045065.

transferred NPS scientists "regularly."<sup>18</sup>

- Since the transfer of NPS scientists to the NBS, the percentage of managers "never" receiving scientific guidance had nearly tripled, from eleven to thirty-two percent.<sup>19</sup>

The NPS drew the following conclusions from the survey results:

- "[T]he perceived level of research and technical assistance regularly provided by former NPS scientists has declined."<sup>20</sup>
- "The proportion of managers receiving no assistance has increased."<sup>21</sup>
- One-fifth of the scientists who were transferred from NPS to the NBS were either "not encouraged or actively discouraged" from assisting NPS managers after the transfer.<sup>22</sup>
- Over fifty percent of the scientists who were transferred from NPS to the NBS "felt that their support from NPS parks had declined."<sup>23</sup>

The absence of science from management decisions is not unique to our parks.<sup>24</sup> Because of its status as a "nonessential" federal function, we will surely see less research in the parks as park funding shrinks.

A third policy-shaping force is the anti-government sentiment that has been manifest in everything from the militia movement to a dramatic increase in anti-conservation and anti-regulation rhetoric in Congress.<sup>25</sup> In concert with the balanced budget push, this anti-government sentiment has encouraged some policy makers to support the sale or transfer of some parks to corporations, counties or states.<sup>26</sup> This was supported by many in the 104th Congress in the form of House Report 260, the National Parks Closure Commission Bill.<sup>27</sup>

18. See NATURAL RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP & SCI. DIRECTORATE, NAT'L PARK SERVICE, WORKING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE NATIONAL BIOLOGICAL SERVICE AND THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE: A SURVEY OF MANAGERS AND SCIENTISTS 1 (1996) [hereinafter MANAGERS & SCIENTISTS SURVEY].

19. See *id.*; See also Collins, *supra* note 17.

20. MANAGERS & SCIENTISTS SURVEY, *supra* note 18, at 3.

21. *Id.*

22. *Id.* at 5.

23. *Id.*

24. See Mike Ivey, *Can Private Interests Be Trusted with the Environment?*, CAPITOL TIMES, Sept. 14, 1996, at B6.

25. See *id.*

26. See *id.*

27. See *A Special Alert to All NPCA Members: Will Congress Close Down*

House Report 104, a bill introduced in January 1997 is another example of this misguided approach to policy-making. The bill would authorize units of the national park system to sell or lease parklands to private individuals.<sup>28</sup> Taken together with the balanced budget forces, such efforts have been characterized as revenue-generating, cost-cutting policy options. These are mistaken beliefs.<sup>29</sup>

A fourth driving force is the changing culture of federal bureaus, including the NPS. Since James Watt taught us the vulnerability of what I will call "the Washington Way" of one federal law, one bureau, one agency budget and one way of management,<sup>30</sup> many land managers and policy-makers have struggled with their identity and their role in policy matters.

Conversely, getting people out of the Washington office of the NPS and into the parks may have been the primary goal of the restructuring, but it appears that some park superintendents may view this as an opportunity to operate fiefdoms, free of accountability and oversight. Intentionally or accidentally, this may result in 374 different interpretations of the NPS Organic Act<sup>31</sup> and a rapid erosion of national park standards, the protection of which has long been the highest priority of the National Parks and Conservation Association (NPCA).<sup>32</sup>

The environmental community, including Washington-based policy groups and local grassroots activists, is a fifth force driving policy developments. From 1919 to 1980, the NPCA was an inside the beltway organization, with all of its staff in Washington, and all of its work focused on Washington. The option of relying solely on a Washington office and regional programs cannot succeed in today's political climate. This has created a challenging

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*the Parks?*, NAT'L PARKS, May-June 1995, at 7.

28. See M. Katherine Heinrich, *Parklands for Sale?*, NAT'L PARKS, Mar./Apr. 1997, at 18.

29. See *Will Congress Close Down the Parks?*, *supra* note 27.

30. See George Cameron Coggins & Dorris K. Nagel, *Nothing Besides Remains: The Legal Legacy of James G. Watt's Tenure As Secretary of the Interior on Federal Land Law and Policy*, 17 B.C. ENVTL. AFF. L. REV. 473, 485 (1990); Richard J. Fink, *The National Wildlife Refuges: Theory, Practice, and Prospect*, 18 HARV. ENVTL. L. REV. 1, 44 (1994).

31. See Change in Organizational Title from Field/Director and Field Area To Regional Director and Region, 62 Fed. Reg. 30,232, 30,233 (1997) (to be codified at 36 C.F.R. 1\*).

32. See MILES, *supra* note 3, at 71-76, 330-33.

situation for many national environmental groups. This challenge, of reinventing and reassessing the role of citizen activism in national environmental affairs, is prevalent throughout the environmental community.<sup>33</sup>

Many, if not all, national environmental organizations are presently addressing this question. As a result, many are undergoing massive restructuring, staff turn-over and re-invention. In a recent essay in *High Country News*, Susan Zakin said this about national environmental groups:

The bad news is that as environmental groups lurch across the bridge to the 21st century, their traditional strengths are faltering in the face of globalization. Each organization is struggling to reinvent itself. Some, like the Sierra Club, are going back to their roots; others are amputating large parts of their staffs and missions. But it's not clear whether either approach will provide the needed steroids—or strategy.<sup>34</sup>

Many national environmental groups are downsizing, restructuring and reinventing themselves.<sup>35</sup> The National Audubon Society recently offered buyouts to every employee with more than ten years' experience and all employees over the age of fifty-five, while both Audubon and Sierra have increased their grassroots operations.<sup>36</sup> Such internal shake-ups have become more common as many conservation organizations reevaluate their most basic assumptions in an effort to become more effective in changing policy in Washington and elsewhere.

The economy of the Western United States is the sixth driving force behind recent policy decisions. Most of our public lands lie in the rapidly changing West and the policies affecting these lands are largely based on outdated assumptions. In his new book, University of Montana Professor Thomas Michael Power calls this outdated set of assumptions "Folk Economics."<sup>37</sup> Power shows us that logging, mining, and grazing are not the heart and soul of Western economies. He demonstrates the economic importance of wildlife, wilderness, and well-protected landscapes.<sup>38</sup>

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33. *See id.* at 324-25.

34. Susan Zakin, *Shake-Up: Greens Inside the Beltway*, HIGH COUNTRY NEWS, Nov. 11, 1996, at 14.

35. *See id.*

36. *See id.*

37. THOMAS MICHAEL POWER, LOST LANDSCAPES AND FAILED ECONOMIES: THE SEARCH FOR A VALUE OF PLACE (1996).

38. *See id.*

In addition, the West is changing in more ways than in its economic structure. In fact, last year, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that:

- Immigrants to the West are causing political change.
- The West is the most urbanized part of the country with ninety percent of its residents living in cities.<sup>39</sup>

Timothy Egan of the *New York Times* reported several other trends that run counter to old assumptions about the West. He reported that, as of December 1996:

- Six of the fifteen fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the U.S. are found in the West.
- Air quality, water shortages, gridlock and sprawl are all becoming common concerns in the West.<sup>40</sup>

Clearly, many old assumptions about the West — that it is largely rural; that it is populated by people dependent on logging, mining, and grazing; and that it is still the land of plenty, as portrayed by eighteenth and nineteenth century explorers and land speculators — are no longer relevant.

Overall population growth is a seventh driving force that is shaping public resource policy. In fact, the United Nations Environmental Programme reported in 1996 that population growth, along with inefficient resource use and wasteful consumption, were serious problems in the world's wealthiest nations.<sup>41</sup> Global human population is growing by almost 90 million per year — an unsustainable rate, according to the Washington D.C.-based Population Institute.<sup>42</sup>

The global population crisis is coming home to roost in the United States in a slightly different, but fully American, way. The

39. See Daniel Sneider, *Stampede of Newcomers Alters How West is Won* (*Western Divide*, pt. 1), CHRISTIAN SCI. MONITOR, Oct. 28, 1996, at 1, available in 1996 WL 5045249. The multipart article also notes, however, that new residents do not yet collectively evidence a discernible slant in terms of federal resource policy. See *id.*; see also Daniel Sneider, *Politics Shift as City Folk Fill the West* (*Western Divide*, pt. 2), CHRISTIAN SCI. MONITOR, Oct. 29, 1996, at 4, available in 1996 WL 5045209.

40. See Timothy Egan, *Urban Sprawl Strains Western States*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 29, 1996, at A1.

41. See *Environment Degradation Worsened over Last Decade*, UNEP Report Says, Int'l Env't Daily (BNA) at D2 (Jan. 2, 1997).

42. See *World Population Growth Slowing*, Institute Reports, WASH. POST, Dec. 28, 1996, at A20, available in 1996 WL 15124489.

human population of Florida, for example, may increase from 14 million to 95 million by the year 2100, according to demographer Leon Bouvier, the founder of Floridians for a Sustainable Population.<sup>43</sup> Other trends in Florida include the following:

- Florida's human population increases by 750 people each day, or 237,500 each year.<sup>44</sup>
- Florida loses 450 acres of forest each day.<sup>45</sup>
- Florida loses 328 acres of farmland to development each day.<sup>46</sup>
- Florida's population growth rate is greater than that of India, China or Japan.<sup>47</sup>

Similar trends are also evident in California's Central Valley:

- The population is expected to triple in the next forty-five years.<sup>48</sup>
- 3.6 million acres of the valley's farmland will be given over to development.<sup>49</sup>

The eighth driving force I would like to identify, is global climate change. It threatens our public resources, and poses problems for our policy-makers. A recent headline in the *Washington Post* proclaimed, *Global Warming Is Forcing Butterflies to Flee, Study Concludes*. According to the article, researchers have found "the first direct biological consequence" of global warming.<sup>50</sup> According to the study, rising temperatures in southern California are forcing the population of "Edith's checkerspot butterfly" northward and killing it off in its southernmost range. In addition to moving to the north, the butterfly is also seeking refuge at higher, cooler elevations.<sup>51</sup>

Ecologist Paul Erlich said that the butterfly "is an excellent cli-

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43. See *Society and Politics Planning: Growth is Causing Strains in FL, CA and PA*, AM. POL. NETWORK/GREENWIRE, Nov. 20, 1996, available in WESTLAW, APN-GR Database.

44. See *id.*

45. See *id.*

46. See *id.*

47. See *id.*

48. See *id.*

49. See *id.*

50. Robert Lee Hotz, *Global Warming is Forcing Butterflies to Flee, Study Concludes*, WASH. POST, Aug. 30, 1996, at A10, available in 1996 WL 10728760.

51. See *id.*

mate sensor — a canary in a coal mine.”<sup>52</sup> Like the canary, the butterfly landscapes the terrain, indicating harmful change for the earth, and especially our national parks. Whatever befalls the best-protected places and their natural systems will in all likelihood befall us as well.

At the request of the NPCA, the Climate Institute recently completed a study of the probable effects of global warming on the United States National Park System.<sup>53</sup> NPCA then reviewed the fifty-four major national parks to make a preliminary estimate of the possible effects of global warming on America’s best-protected places.<sup>54</sup>

The Climate Institute’s preliminary findings show the impact of climate change on our parks and other public lands. According to the report, the rate of global warming and its effect on the parks’ most important features are unparalleled.<sup>55</sup> Atmospheric and oceanic temperatures are changing, snow cover is decreasing, and the sea level is rising.<sup>56</sup> These climate changes threaten barrier islands, coral reefs, glaciers, coastal wetlands, forests, and rare species.<sup>57</sup> They also bode ill for desert-dwelling organisms that are already living at the limits of their tolerance.<sup>58</sup> All of these changes will affect national parks and protected areas around the world. Furthermore, just as these changes affect the plants and animals in our parks, all of them could ultimately affect you and me.

Based on the information collected by the Climate Institute and a preliminary review of the fifty-four U.S. National Parks (Yellowstone, Yosemite, and others), NPCA has found that global warming threatens most, if not all, of our national parks’ natural systems.<sup>59</sup> Coral reefs, including those protected within Biscayne National Park, Fort Jefferson National Monument and Virgin Is-

52. *See id.*

53. *See* NANCY C. WILSON, CLIMATE INST., REPORT ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE NATIONAL PARKS FOR THE NATIONAL PARKS AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION (1996).

54. *See* Robin Winks, DISPELLING THE MYTH: PROTECTING RESOURCES AND PROVIDING PUBLIC ACCESS, NAT’L PARKS, July 1996, at 52, *available in* 1996 WL 9224130.

55. *See* WILSON, *supra* note 53, at 3.

56. *See id.*

57. *See id.* at 5-10, 13-14.

58. *See id.* at 13.

59. *See id.* at 3.

lands National Park, have suffered increased bleaching as sea surface temperatures increase.<sup>60</sup> Alpine and tidal glaciers, including those within Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve and Glacier National Park, are all candidates for rapid retreat.<sup>61</sup>

Global warming's effects will stretch from the sub-arctic to the sub-tropics. Wetland ecosystems, including those protected within Everglades National Park and Big Cypress National Preserve, are also at risk as the sea level rises.<sup>62</sup> These two park units are essential nurseries for birds, fish, and other wildlife.<sup>63</sup> Nowhere does Everglades National Park rise more than a few meters above sea level.<sup>64</sup> Even slight sea level rises will likely lead to catastrophic change in such places. Already, in the state of Louisiana, fifty square miles of wetlands are lost each year.<sup>65</sup>

Unfortunately, the litany of threats continues. The forests of Olympic National Park along with many others may suffer from drought, increased disease and fires as temperatures rise and precipitation patterns shift.<sup>66</sup> Desert ecosystems, including the newly protected portions of California's Mojave, may be changed by drier and hotter conditions.<sup>67</sup> The parks' cultural resources are also liable to be threatened.

Erosion, which global warming will likely accelerate in some areas,<sup>68</sup> has put the historic lighthouses at risk.<sup>69</sup> Since 1870, the steady erosion of North Carolina's outer banks has brought the sea 1487 feet closer to the famed Cape Hatteras Lighthouse more than twelve feet closer every year.<sup>70</sup> Moving the lighthouse inland to protect it would cost \$12 million, requiring Congress to allot federal funds.<sup>71</sup>

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60. *See id.* at 7.

61. *See id.* at 7-9.

62. *See id.* at 9-10.

63. *See id.*

64. *See id.* at 9.

65. *See id.* at 10.

66. *See id.* at 13, 14 n.(a).

67. *See id.* at 13, 14 n.(b).

68. *See id.*

69. *See Lane DeGregory, Scientists Study Move of Famous Hatteras Beacon, VIRGINIAN-PILOT, Dec. 22, 1996, at B4, available in 1996 WL 10873542.*

70. *See id.*

71. *See Lighthouse Fit To Move, N.C. State Professors Say, Greensboro News & Record, Dec. 22, 1996, at B5, available in 1996 WL 12510871.*

The Sierra Club found that forty-nine of the fifty-four major national parks in the United States could see their most "significant" features altered or destroyed by continued global warming.<sup>72</sup> In other words, global warming threatens over ninety percent of America's best-protected places.<sup>73</sup> While I know the United States' national parks best, I also know that the effects of global warming will not be limited to these parks. I could go on, but let me come to an important question which remains: "Now that we know this is a threat, what must we *do*?"<sup>74</sup>

Some of the simple-minded among us suggest that we sell these parks since they may not survive, failing to understand that the parks are the messenger: the canary in the cage; the thermometer in the child's mouth. It is therefore counter-intuitive to shoot the messenger; we should not put the canary out of its misery; and we should certainly not break the thermometer if it tells us the child has a fever.

This is a troubling issue. For if we cannot manage our national parks, our most protected landscapes, in the face of global warming, we will be hard pressed to make effective policy decisions regarding our other national lands.

I have described eight driving forces that have contributed to our most recent policy developments. I have also described their impact on our national parks. Congress, the balanced budget push, anti-government sentiment, agency malaise, an environmental community in transition, a changing economic and demographic structure in the United States, rapid population growth, and global warming are all forces we must recognize.

I do not doubt that there are others. I have simply described those I see as most influential in our policy process of late and I hope that all of us can challenge our assumptions in the face of these forces. I also hope that all of us can begin to improve the state of policy discourse by assessing our assumptions. I would like to talk for a few minutes about the importance of our assumptions, and my search for what I will call "universal assumptions."

While many of the crises facing policy-makers and concerned citizens are visible at the policy level, I believe that the solutions

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72. See WILSON, *supra* note 53, at 7.

73. See WINKS, *supra* note 56.

74. Jessica Matthews, *Forging Consensus on Climate Change*, WASH. POST, July 6, 1996, at A15, available in 1996 WL 10720047.

to these problems will be found through a deeper discussion of assumptions and beliefs. Let us take a step back from these recent trends and their driving forces and look at the broader vision for caring for our public lands.

Because most conflict originates at the level of assumption, as opposed to policy, we must find universal truths, upon which all people can think globally and act locally. This must be accomplished before we can begin to solve our policy problems. What assumptions, for example, could James Watt and I share? Or perhaps we could step even further back and look at two very different cultures, the Tibetan and the American, for instance. This search for universal assumptions is the crux of our search for solutions.

Regardless of our approach, the question we are attempting to answer is this: "Are there timeless precepts that bind all people, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, personality, religion, or political affiliation?" Countless thinkers have faced this question as they have sought common ground with their adversaries. Many have attempted to answer it.

Today, I will tread into this question and describe an answer that is based on a return to fundamentals — a back-to-basics approach that is based on two "eternal" values, two "perfect" assumptions. This is a difficult task and one I have been reluctant to attempt. However, I would like to suggest two elementary assumptions that all of us can agree upon and that can become an effective basis for addressing policy matters.

The first assumption I support is that all humans share a desire to ensure the survival of humanity. This includes the survival of the self; the survival of the family; and the survival of the species. One assumption that unites all people is evident in the day-to-day life of us all.

It was perhaps best described by Charles Darwin in his classic description of natural selection. There is a struggle for survival, wrote Darwin, because organisms must compete with each other for food, space, mates and other necessities that are in limited supply. Darwin based his work on what he called "the struggle for existence." This struggle is what we will call "self-survival." It is paramount and universal. It is truth. All people are fundamentally concerned with surviving—with continuing their own existence. The self-survival precept is reflected in the quest for food, shelter, wealth, material goods, and power.

A second element of our first assumption is a universal desire for the survival of the family. This precept is one step removed

from, but closely related to, self-survival. The survival of the family is important to all people because the family can provide support for the individual. By supporting the individual, the family contributes to the survival of the self. Many thinkers have realized the beneficial role of families.<sup>75</sup>

One step removed from the survival of the family is a third desire that binds all people. It is the deep, genetically programmed precept that drives us to ensure the survival of our species. The drive to sustain our species by caring for our descendants is the survival of the self writ large.

Perhaps Michael Frome, an eminent author and conservationist, said it best by writing, "Our children need and deserve hope, a reason to believe, to study for a future with meaning."<sup>76</sup> According to this statement and dozens more like it, the survival of the species underscores all humanity's thinking, planning, and scheming. I believe that this shared assumption is a sound truth for shaping public policy.

The second universal assumption that would serve us well as a basis for shaping public policy is one the environmental movement has often relied upon. For many years, we have touted the importance of the beauty, truth, solitude, and ethical lessons which protected areas provide. This assumption that truth, beauty, ethics and art are universal because they contribute to the renewal of the human spirit, is an assumption shared by all people. Since John Muir pioneered modern environmental thought, the second precept has been at the core of our plans, our politics, and our public relations strategies.

For a long time, environmentalists have believed that the preservation of beauty is a binding precept, a self-sufficient assumption. This has been most beneficial, but in order to move forward in the twenty-first century, we cannot focus on this second precept alone. In park protection efforts, as in life, we cannot succeed on the merits of this assumption if we neglect the survival of the family and of humanity. Our failure has been our neglect of the other, more basic precepts that bind all people.

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75. See, e.g., Therese Benedek, *The Emotional Structure of the Family*, in *THE FAMILY: ITS FUNCTION AND DESTINY* 355 (Ruth Nanda Anshen ed., rev. ed. 1959).

76. Michael Frome, Personal Communication with the author (1996).

While the pure preservation messages and its permutations have been the common currency of the environmental community, they have not been universally accepted and have, during times of national crisis, been classified as non-essential. During World War II, for example, the Spruce forests of Olympic National Park were seen by many as raw material for the war machine, not as sanctuaries of beauty and spirituality. The following is a statement made by William B. Greeley of the West Coast Lumbermen's Association in 1931: "The Olympic Peninsula National Park should do its part toward victory by giving up certain of its fine grade, old growth timber to the war effort. The principle of our draft should extend from our boys to our resources. Nothing is too sacred to do its share."<sup>77</sup>

Greeley's statement emphasizes the importance of the survival of our nation, our families and ourselves. The preservation of our heritage has been a highly provocative issue in the years since World War II. Recently, preservation efforts based on the second precept alone, have elicited the following reactions: "The [environmentalists] are a socialist group of individuals that are the tool of the Democratic Party. I'm proud to say that they are my enemy."<sup>78</sup> A quick look back at the 104th Congress provides evidence that messages such as these had seen great success in the media and at the polls.<sup>79</sup>

In three years, we will embark upon a voyage into the twenty-first century and beyond. Beginning a new millennium is a special event, no matter how you slice it. It is a psychological milestone and an opportunity for reflection and hope. As we pause and reflect, it is my hope that we remember that the care we give to the environment is a reflection of our sense of concern for ourselves, our families, our nation and our species. I hope we remember that our national parks are an element of, and a metaphor for, that concern. I am also hopeful that more people will come to know that the global environment is little more than the parks writ large. As go the parks, so will our other public lands and our lives' quality. They are inseparable in meaning and in destiny.

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77. MILES, *supra* note 3, at 44.

78. Rep. Don Young (Alaska Public Radio Network, Aug. 19, 1996), *quoted in They Really Said It!*, *supra* note 13.

79. See Rep. George E. Brown Jr., *Environmental Science Under Siege in the U.S. Congress*, ENV'T, Mar. 1997, at 13.

Here are some highlights of our recent performance on global issues:

According to a report issued in October 1996 by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, one-fourth of all mammal species world-wide are facing extinction.<sup>80</sup> Half of those have an eighty percent chance of disappearing forever within ten years.<sup>81</sup> Eleven percent of all birds, twenty percent of all reptiles, twenty-five percent of all amphibians, and one-third of all fish in the world are endangered as well.<sup>82</sup> At least twenty-nine mammal populations have disappeared from national parks in western North America because our parks are too small, poorly protected and disconnected.<sup>83</sup>

As I have already discussed, the well-being of our national parks, from Yellowstone to Gettysburg, is threatened. As the twenty-first century arrives, it will bring more people, greater demands for resources, more elderly citizens dependent on an already stressed economy, and more questions as to the well-being of our nation.

As I look ahead to today's agenda, I see further evidence that our national parks serve us well as metaphors for many other public policy issues. Extinction, for example, has made inroads against our best defenses. Recent reports in *National Parks Magazine*,<sup>84</sup> the *New York Times*,<sup>85</sup> and the journal *Conservation Biology*<sup>86</sup> have announced the prevalence of extinction within our national parks.<sup>87</sup> According to conservation biologist William D. Newmark, species are vanishing from national parks in western North America because the parks are too small and too isolated from other suitable habitat. In fact, twenty-nine mammal species have become extinct in fourteen national parks in western North

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80. See Rick Weiss, *One-Fourth of Mammal Species Face Extinction*, WASH. POST, Oct. 4, 1996, at A03, available in 1996 WL 12723107.

81. See *id.*

82. See *id.*

83. See William Newmark, *Extinction of Mammal Populations in Western North American National Parks*, 9 CONSERVATION BIOLOGY 512, 512 (1995); see also David Quammen, *National Parks: Nature's Dead End*, N.Y. TIMES, July 28, 1996, at D13.

84. Paul Pritchard, *The Evolution Time Bomb*, NAT'L PARKS, July-Aug. 1993, at 22.

85. Quammen, *supra* note 83.

86. Newmark, *supra* note 84.

87. See *id.*

America since the parks were designated.<sup>88</sup> This accelerated extinction rate is a warning that wildlife in other places are likely to be threatened as well.

Environmental education is also relevant to our national park policy. For decades, our national parks have served as the classrooms of the greatest outdoor university in the world, playing an essential role in the learning process. Yet interpretive rangers are seldom seen today and not likely to become more common in the future.<sup>89</sup>

Just as I have used the national parks as metaphors, all of the issues we discuss today will have some relationship with our universal assumptions. By striving to understand the assumptions that drive our park policies, I believe we will improve our understanding of other public resource policy issues. By taking this step forward, I hope that we will be able to move beyond conflicting policies toward shared, sound assumptions that will allow us to become better stewards and citizens of this nation.

In closing, I would like to challenge all of you to understand and reevaluate your assumptions and consider the importance of agreeing upon universal assumptions as the starting point for real policy progress. Thank you.

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88. *See id.*

89. *See generally Declining Budgets Have Hurt National Parks*, NAT'L PARKS & CONSERVATION ASS'N UPDATE (Nat'l Parks & Conservation Ass'n, Washington, DC) 1996.

