

People Pressures Threaten Values Of Wilderness

NPS Director Russell E. Dickenson, in a November 1981 Distinguished Lecture at the University of Idaho Wilderness Center, described the wilderness management dilemma, laying particular emphasis on the management of human beings. "The regulation of human use," he said, depends in the long run on "informed public support".

Dickenson described wilderness parks, once protected by their solitude, as now locked into a struggle not only against the encroachments of the spoilers but against the embraces of would-be worshippers. The U.S. population in Thoreau's 1850 America was only 23 million, he said. In 1900, Muir's America had but 76 million. "For every Muir, we now have three; for every Thoreau, ten. Is it any wonder," he asked, "that there is more pressure for use of our wild lands?"

Dickenson made a strong case for the role of wilderness areas in the preservation of genetic diversity. He noted the disappearance of the lush resources that were in place when the first European settlers arrived – the forests and prairies, the passenger pigeon, the Carolina parakeet and the ivory-billed woodpecker. "The variety of animal life and plants that have become history are uncounted," he said.

At the same time, he noted there is still wealth to be hoarded and preserved . . . "rare and unique species (that) can be vital to our future. It is our charge," he told his listeners, "to protect what we have. In the perpetuation of the strange, the unusual, the little understood, we may hold the key to the perpetuation of our own kind. For all that we have managed to control, our destiny is still tied to the land and the sea of this planet."

Dickenson cautioned that "We should not casually throw away any life form. We should study it, protect it, find its usefulness, or failing that, leave it for our descendants to assess anew."

Of the approximately 80,000 edible varieties of plants on earth, only 150 varieties have ever been cul-

tivated on a large scale, with fewer than 20 producing 90 percent of the world's food. Dickenson described the relatively recent development of such modern staples as corn, peanuts and soy beans and related these improvements to the wild strains that make hybridized plants possible. A recent discovery in the foothills of Central Mexico "holds great promise for improved food supplies the world over," he said. This native evergreen corn plant could easily have been lost

Quoted by Director Dickenson in his Nov. 12, 1981 Wilderness Lecture: "Protection and preservation of the physical memorials of our natural and historic origins is primary, of course. And I suppose a good case could be made for the mere locking-up of our most important treasures – the fragile and the irreplaceable and the 'bank deposits' of study in future years – because they are arks of our covenant and even when not seen are an inspiration through the feeling that they exist and are safe.

But fortunately, save in rare instances, this is not at all required. We can use these precious resources, so long as we do not use them up. Put it this way: We should not dissipate our capital, but we should zealously dispense the interest."

***Freeman Tilden,
in "Interpreting Our Heritage"***

forever to the world, had not a Texas botanist found it in a forest destined for clearcutting to make way for cattle to graze.

"The natural storehouses of parks may someday prove invaluable," Dickenson said. "We must remember that the purple foxglove of Europe is the source for digitalis, a common heart compound to which millions can credit their lives. And who would care to go back to a time when the infamous bread mold, penicillin, was just a common nuisance?"

Dickenson stressed the need for acquisition of baseline information. "Few parks," he said "have an adequate inventory of their natural resources. Few parks possess adequate information to implement enlightened management strategies. Good knowledge of the identity and location of park resources is prerequisite to wise stewardship. Improving the park's database will require that priority be given to conducting field studies on all types of physical and biological resources."