

Vertical File

~~Bill Woodward~~

STATEMENT AS PRESENTED AT JOSHUATOWN ASSOCIATION MEETING

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 30th, 1972

My name is Robert Fiske. I live on Cove Road and am a Director of the Lyme Conservation Land Trust and of Save the Wetlands Committee and a member of the Lyme Planning and Zoning Commission. I stand to benefit financially if this Plan goes through, as I happen to own 75 acres of land on Lord's Hill which would apparently be taken by the Government, and would expect to be paid for some or all of it considerably more than it cost me. For the record let me say that I bought it to leave in its undeveloped state to my children and do not wish to sell it to the U.S. Government or anyone else no matter how much money I might make on its sale.

I have read the Gateway Unit Plan as carefully as I can and weighed its probable effect (as I see it) on the land involved within the proposed Park area and nearby land left out. I have visited the National Seashore Park on Cape Cod, talked at length with its very efficient Superintendent Mr. Arnberger and two members of its Advisory Committee and have also had a lengthy conversation with an official of the Cape Cod Planning and Economic Development Commission - the organization charged with considering the problems and planning the future of that portion of Cape Cod which lies outside the Park. It is said that Barnstable County, which comprises all the Cape, is the second fastest-growing county in the United States.

My comments are directed to Lyme - as I know it best.

All residents of the area should be grateful that there is a local committee concerned with interpreting its problems and views to the Federal and State authorities, and for the months of

conscientious thought which it has given to the complex problems involved. I am sure we all hope they will ultimately come up with a plan which we can all approve.

With all due respect, however, I cannot accept their conclusions regarding this proposed plan, nor the premises from which they derive. The basic problem divides into two parts -

(a) What is the Park's effect on the land and its owners within its boundaries?

(b) What is its effect on the portion of neighboring communities which lies outside the boundaries?

Within the Park

The shock and unhappiness of landowners who will be forced to give up their holdings will provoke more eloquent protests from others. In my own case I will be unexpectedly enriched. But the damage to one of Connecticut's most beautiful tidal wetlands will be incalculable and irreversible.

The Ribicoff Bill speaks of "preserving the priceless, natural beauty and historic heritage of the river valley". I know Lord's Cove well. Several years ago I bought and gave to the Town four acres of wetlands within it. Under the Gateway Plan this great complex of creeks and marshes, the home and breeding ground of fish and wild-fowl, will be flanked on two sides by Park Land taken by the Government from private owners and opened to the public for "canoeing, picnicking, hiking, nature study and group camping". Within the 440 acres around the Cove acquired by the Federal Government would be provision for 200 "group campers" a night. In the 100 day peak season mentioned by the Committee this would add up to 20,000 - ten times the population

of Lyme. A like fate would befall 680 Poplar Hill acres in East Haddam - Can anyone really believe that designating the surrounded area as "Forever Wild" will save it from public desecration?

Most of us are now familiar with some of the serious problems of pollution, congestion, drugs and crime in our National Parks. For those who are not, I recommend the following eye-opening articles -

Pristine Preserves or Popcorn Playgrounds?
Saturday Review, January 1, 1972

Empire in Trouble
Field and Stream, March 1972

Why are We Ruining Our National Parks?
Changing Times, July 1972

Are Our National Parks Unfit for People - or Vice Versa
Senior Scholastic - March 27, 1972

The Allagash Waterway
Audubon, July 1972

The New London Day of March 5, 1971 states:

"while serious crimes - robberies, assaults, burglaries, larcenies, auto thefts, rapes and homicides - increased nationwide by 53% from 1966 through 1969, they rose by 126% in national parks in the same period."

The Cape Cod National Seashore is often cited as an exception; and the Gateway Unit Plan refers frequently to its favorable aspects. The Seashore is unique - a 40 mile stretch of contiguous beach owned partly by towns but mostly by the Federal Government and lying within a virtually solid area of sanddunes, salt grass and scrub growth embracing 18,000 acres now, with 6,000 more in the process of Federal acquisition. Within its borders hiking, bicycling, swimming, and limited fishing and hunting are allowed. There are no picnic tables or refreshment stands, no group camping, and no litter. It is

beautifully run and appears to be a model of mixed recreation and conservation. And yet Mr. Arnberger told me that the 60 beach buggy permits of 1966 have increased under pressure to 2,300 in just five years - with no letup in sight.

The National Seashore Park was unquestionably established in 1959 just in time to save that precious stretch of beach from the honky-tonk development afflicting other parts of Cape Cod. If the Government had not saved it, the virtual absence of effective local zoning would have insured its speedy deterioration. We do not have that problem in Lyme.

Nor is there a lack of available public parks. Over 3,300 acres, (15%) of Lyme's land area, is now in public hands - and off the tax rolls. The original study of the Connecticut River Park project by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, published under the title "New England Heritage" in July 1968, said there were then 60 Parks with a total of 22,000 acres on the Connecticut River; and there are stated to be twenty-one Parks within twenty miles of Hamburg - many of them poorly maintained. If greater public recreational facilities are needed why not use some of the \$23,000,000 proposed for the Riverway to improve existing Parks, rather than opening up invaluable wetland areas to the inevitability of public abuse?

Conservation - preservation - is totally incompatible with recreational use; and the Gateway Plan would end up in the desecration of priceless areas which are now protected.

Outside the Park

In 1971 the National Seashore had 4,000,000 visitor days - figured at 3.7 persons per car for each visit to the Park. At the current annual growth rate of 15% this figure could be 8,000,000 in five years - if there is room. In addition to the rented cottages, hotels and motels within easy access to the Park, there were a total of 22 Camp Sites, Tent Sites and Trailer Parks. Only nine of them publish their capacity - totalling 905 Camp and Trailer Sites - 273 Camp and Tent Sites. At the same average for the others - the total would be about 2,500. We have none in Lyme and present zoning excludes them.

The Gateway Committee estimates present annual visitor days in the proposed Park area at 760,000 - although without a check point like the Seashore Park, they don't tell us how occupants of passing cars are distinguished between visitors, and residents on their way to the supermarket. The Gateway Committee also estimates that visitor days within the Park would reach 700,000 per year - 450,000 of them during the 100 day peak season.

"New England Heritage" tells us that twelve years ago in 1960 - forty million people lived within 250 miles of the proposed Park, 5,600,000 of them within 50 miles. These figures make it hard to accept the Gateway Committee's visitor day estimate - but even if we do, where will the adjacent communities put the presently non-existent camp sites and trailer Parks to accomodate the visitors?

The more carefully one reads the proposed Plan the more one is struck by the lack of consideration for its impact on the areas outside the Park - the traffic, sanitation, pollution, policing and other problems. To say, as it does on Page 9, that the only required

road improvement would be widening some portion of Bokum Road in Saybrook is an obvious admission that traffic flow (already a week-end problem) hasn't been seriously considered. For example, Ely's Ferry Road, leading to the site of proposed canoeing, picnicking, group camping, etc., is one mile of winding paved road barely wide enough for two passenger cars to pass, and one mile of even narrower dirt road. Would it remain so?

Let me sum up - we cannot open our land to a National Park without destroying the "priceless, natural beauty" to which Senator Ribicoff continually refers. And we cannot handle in our quiet communities the problems which the hordes of Park visitors would throw upon us.