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NATIONAL FOREST RECREATION AREAS OVERCROWDED.

Facts About the Recreation Situation
In the National Forests

Americans made 26 million visits to the National Forests in 1949. They visited the Forests to fish, ski, hunt, swim, ride, hike, or look and sit. The largest single recreation activities were camping and picnicking. Of the 26 million visits, 11.5 million were to the National Forest campgrounds and picnicking areas provided by the U. S. Forest Service.

Public recreation areas wearing out

Facilities provided by the Forest Service at public camp and picnic grounds are limited to those essential for safety, sanitation, and minimum comfort and convenience for the public. They include fireplaces, tables, safe water supplies, toilets, and garbage pits. More than 4,500 of these public recreation areas have been developed over the years; most of them were constructed by the CCC boys during the '30s.

Many recreation facilities have now
deteriorated beyond repair

Maintenance of National Forest recreation areas was largely suspended during World War II. Since the war, the Forest Service, with the limited funds and manpower available, has not been able to repair or replace worn-out facilities fast enough to keep up with the increased use of the areas, and the continuing deterioration of the facilities.

Congestion results in abuse to facilities and hastens their deterioration.

Acute sanitation problems exist in many areas

Many National Forest camping and picnicking areas no longer meet the sanitation requirements of State laws. They will have to be improved—or closed. The Forest Service cannot permit the use of areas which are a hazard to public health and safety.

Recreation facilities now taxed beyond their limits

When a designated recreation area is overcrowded, many people camp or picnic on unimproved areas where there is danger of polluting water that is used for domestic purposes. The danger of costly fires is increased when campers build their fires in places not equipped with fireplaces.

Inadequate facilities means public dissatisfaction. Overcrowding reduces the enjoyment of those using the area. It may also spoil the area for future recreational use. Attractive ground cover is destroyed; dust accumulates; the trampling even weakens or kills mature trees.

Funds available for custodianship and cleanup of camping and picnicking areas are not enough to provide the caretakers needed for removal of garbage and debris, cleanup and care of latrines, looking after the water system, grounds cleanup, and general custodianship of the areas.

The caretaker force is so inadequate that many camps are left without attention for weeks at a time. In such cases garbage and trash accumulates to a deplorable and alarming degree.

It is up to campers to do all they can to lessen this accumulation.

The people play; who should pay?

Access to the National Forests and use of most recreation facilities is free to the public. But it costs money to provide and maintain these facilities.

At the suggestion of the Appropriation Committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives, the Forest Service during the past two years has tried making a small charge at some of the more heavily used camping and picnicking areas. This was on an experimental basis, exploring the question whether recreation use in the National Forests should pay at least some part of its own way.

But for the most part, recreation in the National Forests does not produce revenue for the Government. Even the money collected for the experimental charges, as the law now stands, must be turned into the general fund of the U. S. Treasury.

Recreational use of the National Forests is increasing

The annual total of recreation visitors is now more than double what it was before World War II. Since the war the increase has been especially rapid. In 1946, 18 million visits were reported. In 1949, 26 million.

Opportunities for wholesome, inexpensive outdoor recreation are important to the health and well-being of the American people. Such recreation will be especially important to help relieve the stresses and tensions of the present defense effort. During World War II, National Forest recreation areas near military bases and industrial centers were heavily used by members of the armed forces and by war workers.

National Forest recreation also is important from the business standpoint. Many business enterprises are supported by tourist and vacation activities. National Forest recreation is the economic backbone of many communities.

What Is Needed

Reasonable provision for the recreation needs of the people and the protection of the visitors who now use the National Forest camps and picnic areas requires maintenance and repair of existing facilities. It calls for development of many new camp and picnic areas and construction of additional facilities to take care of the overflow from present camps and of the increasing numbers of recreation visitors. It calls for something like five times as many caretakers and seasonal forest assistants as are now available to maintain facilities, take care of cleanup, and handle the recreational use.

INYO NATIONAL FOREST -- An Example of
Inadequate Recreation Facilities

In 1927, 2,370 campers visited the Inyo National Forest in California. In 1938, 13,931. In 1949, 235,000.

Since before World War II, there has been no expansion of recreation facilities to take care of expanding use. Camps that were developed for 20 parties now handle 40 to 60 parties. Seven to nine recreation aids and laborers try to handle maintenance of sanitary facilities and other campground cleanup for as many as 7,700 campers per day.

Ninety percent of existing camp units are substandard. Many facilities are worn out. Congestion has resulted in abuse to facilities and unsupervised camping in areas where no facilities exist.

Unsanitary acts are contaminating water. A survey in 1950 showed positive coliform bacteria in all Inyo National Forest streams.

Water originating on the Inyo Forest is used for domestic purposes by a resident population of 14,000. Transient visitors double this population in summer.

Recreation is the principal economic support of the Inyo communities; 75 percent of the local people depend directly or indirectly on recreation for their livelihood. Any restrictions or closures to protect public health would affect the economy of the area.

To relieve congestion and improve sanitary conditions on existing facilities will require developing new recreation areas, repair and improvement of existing facilities, and additional custodial people.

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59
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50
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