

A Blueprint for Recreation

One of Interior Secretary Walter Hickel's last acts before he was unceremoniously sacked by President Nixon in 1970 was to lay down an elaborate blueprint for the nation's recreational needs through the year 2000.

Unknown to all but a few White House aides, Hickel and his predecessor, Stewart Udall, had spent \$7 million to produce the two-inch-thick volume.

The suppressed report is important to every American, whether his favorite recreation is to join the 150 million annual picnickers or the 1.5 million mountain climbers.

In exhaustive detail, Hickel and Udall laid out where future national parks should be and selected sites for federal seashores, monuments and forests.

Using complicated formulas, they estimated the cost of keeping fish in the streams, game in the woodlands, pure sand on the beaches and the splash of the wild in America's increasingly tamed and polluted rivers.

Extraordinary pains were taken to balance the needs of the poor, the handicapped and the aged with those of ordinary family vacationers.

It would cost a staggering \$42 billion, the suppressed report estimates, to begin to meet the nation's future recreational needs. Enormous though this figure may be, it is slightly less than what it cost to run the Vietnam War for two years. The report suggests the cost should be shared by federal, state and local governments.

On July 17, 1970, Hickel submitted the oversized volume to President Nixon, with a ringing appeal that "Americans cannot and will not tolerate the continued blight and destruction of their land and waters . . . I present to you," offered Hickel, "a major step forward."

But Hickel's big step, like a footprint on the sands of the sea, washed out. The White House crowd took one look at the \$42 billion price tag and quietly pigeonholed the study.

In its place, the President later issued an 89-page report, distinguished only by its spectacular color photos and its expensive glossy paper. This slick production, typical of the public relations that has characterized the Nixon administration, was more impressive in form than substance. Its most memorable feature was the title, "A Legacy for America."



The public was never supposed to see the original study that they had paid \$7 million to produce. Its offset plates, ready for printing, were hidden away for four years in a white cardboard box in an Interior Department cubbyhole.

But a few weeks ago, Senate Interior Chairman Henry Jackson (D-Wash.) learned about the report's existence and won the Interior Department's approval to extricate it from its hiding place. He is now preparing to turn the suppressed study over to the public printer for belated publication.

In a confidential memo, he has charged that the administration's failure to print the report "represents the retreat from the challenging task which lies ahead of us." He is making the report available, without specifically supporting all its findings, so the American people can "intelligently and conscientiously assess the needs."

From one of the original numbered copies, here are highlights from the study:

- The greatest recreational needs, according to the study, are in these areas: New York-Newark, Chicago, Philadelphia-Camden, Washington-Baltimore, Boston-Providence, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, Denver, Minneapolis-St. Paul, New Orleans and Buffalo. Help for these cities alone would benefit 96 million people.

- The report recommends that the Pentagon give up numerous forts, fields and other facilities, totaling thousands of acres, to be converted into public playgrounds. Other federal land, it suggests, can also be used for recreation.

- The report calls for reversing the trend toward urban sprawl. Polluters of water, land and air should be prosecuted. Communities should get federal technical help to zone out ugliness.

- Private recreation developers should be encouraged, with limited subsidies for state and local recreation, all under close federal supervision.

- The report states that picknicking and pleasure driving are the most popular forms of recreation today but predicts that by the year 2000, it will be swimming. The most recreation-minded people, says the report, are Westerners.

- The study offers detailed proposals for several major projects. For example, one project would make it possible for visitors to Washington to travel along the Potomac River as part of their visit. As the report portrays it, the "Potomac National River would consist of several thousand acres of some of the finest scenic landscapes in the east — forests, agricultural and pastoral lands, shores, bluffs and river islands. It would form an added green

belt . . . for Harpers Ferry, Antietam and the C&O Canal."

- Similar federal development would take place on the sugar-sanded islands off the Florida and Mississippi coasts, some of Georgia's Sea Islands, the Great Prairie Lakes, the Virginia barrier islands and the Ten Thousand islands of Florida.

- Other sites selected for careful development would be the Wrangell mountains of Alaska, Kauai National Park in Hawaii, the Voyageurs parks in Minnesota, the Channel islands of California, Buffalo River in the Ozarks, Fossil Butte in Wyoming, Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts and a giant Gateway park to serve New York and New Jersey. Desert lands such as the Great Basin, the Mohave, the Sonoran and the Chihuahuan would be protected from commercial encroachment.

Present federal efforts, the report finds, are "fragmented and uncoordinated." Even though a half billion acres of public land are now used for recreation, the study contends, it is poorly administered by eight federal agencies and unconnected state units.

Footnote: An administration spokesman said the President's report, "A Legacy for America," reflected the current tight budget and was the best report possible "under present circumstances."