

ACQUISITION OF PUBLIC LANDS FOR RECREATIONAL PURPOSES

MARCH 31, 1926.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. SINNOTT, from the Committee on the Public Lands, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany H. R. 10773]

The Committee on the Public Lands, to whom was referred H. R. 10773, to authorize acquisition or use of public lands by States, counties, or municipalities for recreational purposes, having considered the same, report it favorably to the House with the recommendation that it do pass without amendment.

The above bill was introduced by the chairman of this committee at the request of Hon. Dwight F. Davis, chairman of the President's committee on outdoor recreation, and has the approval of the Secretary of the Interior. Heretofore acquisition of public lands by States, counties, and municipalities for park and recreational purposes has been accomplished through special bills. In view of the importance of this class of legislation it is thought that it would be advisable for Congress to give consideration to general legislation delegating to the Secretary of the Interior authority to dispose of lands chiefly valuable for recreational and park purposes, rather than resort to specific legislation in each instance.

There are attached hereto for the information of the House various letters urging the passage of the above bill and explaining fully the reasons therefor.

MARCH 5, 1926.

Hon. N. J. SINNOTT,
*Chairman Committee on Public Lands,
House of Representatives.*

MY DEAR MR. SINNOTT: From time to time there have been introduced in Congress bills seeking the acquisition of lands for park or recreational purposes on behalf of various municipalities, counties, or States. In view of this class of

legislation, which is becoming of increased importance, it would seem advisable for the Congress to consider legislation which would give general authority to the Secretary of the Interior to dispose of lands classified as chiefly valuable for recreation, rather than resort to the necessity of specific legislation in each case. Popular interest in outdoor recreation is becoming greatly stimulated, and many States, counties, and municipalities are now embarking upon far-reaching programs to meet this end. This movement can be accomplished in plan-wise fashion, in so far as the unreserved public domain is concerned, if legislation can be enacted which will permit the political agencies, other than Federal, to acquire or purchase lands now unappropriated.

With this end in view, the Secretary of the Interior asked me in my capacity as chairman of the President's committee on outdoor recreation to consider a draft of legislation which would permit the acquisition or use of public lands for recreational purposes. This proposal was submitted to a subcommittee of the President's committee composed of officials representing the various Federal Departments interested in the public lands. This committee submitted a draft of legislation the principles of which were approved and transmitted to the Secretary of the Interior for technical review and formal approval. May I invite your attention to a copy of a letter dated July 30 from the Hon. Hubert Work; the Assistant Secretary of War's reply of January 4, and Mr. Work's final answer of February 1, inclosing a draft of a bill which meets with his formal approval.

On behalf of the President's committee on outdoor recreation, may I ask that the proposed legislation as approved by the Secretary of the Interior receive the consideration of your committee, and if it meets with approval that steps be taken for its introduction at this session of Congress. For your information, an identical letter has been addressed to Senator Stanfield, chairman of the Senate Committee on Public Lands and Surveys.

Sincerely yours,

Secretary of War,
Chairman President's Committee on Outdoor Recreation.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Washington, July 30, 1925.

Hon. JOHN W. WEEKS,
Secretary of War,
Chairman President's Committee on Outdoor Recreation.

MY DEAR MR. SECRETARY: I understand that the general recreational measure to be submitted to the Congress by the National Conference on Outdoor Recreation is under consideration, but that the form of the measure has not as yet been determined.

The conference, as you know, has declared in its recently adopted program that the purpose of its recreational survey of Federal lands now in progress is to locate the recreational resources in Federal ownership in order that areas of value may be protected and responsibility for their administration and development taken over by the Government, or the lands transferred by appropriate legislation to State, county, or municipal agencies as circumstances surrounding the specific areas may determine. At the request of the Committee on Recreational Survey of Federal Lands, employees of this department are securing data concerning the recreational possibilities of unreserved public lands, and it is believed that many of the areas which have been reported to that committee will be classified by the conference as more suitable for State than national recreational areas. There is, however, no general law authorizing the States to acquire public lands for such purpose, special legislation having been enacted in those instances in which public lands have been acquired by States, either by direct grant or purchase for park use.

The effect of the national conference on State parks has been to stimulate the interest of the States in and increase their desire for parks, and will probably cause most of the public-land States to consider ways and means of obtaining public lands for that purpose. In pursuance of this object, the State of Washington obtained from the last Congress small grants of public lands for recreational use, and the States of Nevada and Utah have recently informed the Commissioner of the General Land Office of this department that the acquisition of public lands is essential to the success of their park plans.

Instead of having the interested States submit to the Congress park legislative programs of their own, in my opinion, it would be advisable to incorporate in the recreational measure presented by the conference a section which would authorize such States to acquire public lands found chiefly valuable for recreational purposes and not needed as national recreational areas through exchange or purchase. In order to secure the wider recreational development planned by the conference, the counties in which the lands are situated and adjacent municipalities should also be permitted to purchase public lands so classified.

I therefore submit herewith for consideration by those appointed by the conference to formulate its measure a draft of such section.

Very truly yours,

HUBERT WORK.

JANUARY 4, 1926.

MY DEAR MR. SECRETARY: Reference is made to your letter of July 30, addressed to Mr. Weeks, inclosing a draft of legislation prepared by a committee of the National Conference on Outdoor Recreation.

Action on the recommendation of the committee has been held up pending an inquiry into the advisability of broadening the suggested legislation to include reserved public lands as well as those now unappropriated. It now seems best to confine the suggested legislation to the unappropriated public domain and to areas not needed for Federal administration.

The principles of the bill meet with my approval, and I therefore request that the provisions as drafted be subjected to the technical scrutiny of the Interior Department and submitted for your official ratification. When this is done steps can then be taken seeking the introduction of this bill for the consideration of Congress.

Very sincerely yours,

HANFORD MACNIDER,
*The Assistant Secretary of War,
Executive Secretary, President's Committee on Outdoor Recreation.*

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR,
Washington, D. C.

WASHINGTON, February 1, 1926.

HON. HANFORD MACNIDER,
*Assistant Secretary of War,
Executive Secretary, President's Committee on Outdoor Recreation.*

MY DEAR SECRETARY MACNIDER: Reference is had to your letters of January 4 and 9, transmitting for further consideration and official ratification the draft of legislation submitted with my letter of July 30, 1925.

Such legislation was suggested to authorize, in view of the declaration of purpose made by the conference in its July, 1925, program, project 3, page 8, acquisition by States, counties, or municipalities of unreserved public lands, chiefly valuable for recreational purposes, and not desired for Federal administration.

I agree with you that it is best at this time to confine the recreational legislation recommended by the conference to the unreserved public lands. No objection is seen to the amendments suggested by the Committee on Public Lands Administration, which would permit exchange with a State either upon the basis of equal area or value, and would substitute a definite for an indefinite forfeiture period in event of nonuser. In my opinion it would be advisable to provide also for recreational use of the unreserved public lands with retention of title.

I submit herewith with my approval the former draft amended in the particulars indicated.

Very truly yours,

HUBERT WORK.

○

