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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

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MAR 5 1973

Mr. James G. Watt, Director
Bureau of Outdoor Recreation
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C.

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Dear Mr. Watt:

The General Accounting Office has reviewed the planning and development of Federal outdoor recreation by the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR), the National Park Service, the Forest Service, and the Corps of Engineers. Our review was concerned primarily with the effectiveness of the programs of these Federal agencies for acquiring land for recreation purposes and developing recreation facilities to meet the most pressing outdoor recreation needs of our Nation.

Our recent report to the Congress on "Greater Benefits to More People Possible by Better Uses of Federal Outdoor Recreation Grants," (B-176823, dated October 5, 1972), pointed out that the areas of the greatest recreation need were still the metropolitan centers as had been the case in 1962, according to the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission's report to the President and the Congress.

With the passage of Public Law 88-29 in 1963, the Congress decided it to be desirable that all Americans be assured of access to adequate outdoor recreation resources. The law further provided for the Federal development of a nationwide plan which would identify areas of critical outdoor recreation shortage and recommend appropriate corrective actions by each level of government.

In 1964, the presidentially appointed Recreation Advisory Council indicated the Federal Government's responsibility for urban-related outdoor recreation by stating that Federal agencies should balance their acquisition of recreation areas between unique areas such as Yellowstone and Grand Canyon National Parks with recreation areas near population centers. Prior to that time, most of the major recreation areas managed by Federal agencies were in the western portion of the country and away from the major population centers.

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Several recent additions to the National Park System have been located relatively close to major urban centers, most notably the Gateway and Golden Gate National Recreation Areas in New York and San Francisco, respectively. Moreover, since 1964 the Federal Government has provided increased assistance to urban areas through Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grants and surplus property transfers under the President's Legacy of Parks program.

During our review we conducted case studies of the availability of Federal recreation opportunities in five major metropolitan areas—Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. We visited each of these cities and met with officials of city recreation agencies, the BOR regional offices, and other Federal agencies providing outdoor recreation opportunities within 50 miles of the city. From these visits and from reviews of BOR studies we learned that major outdoor recreation needs of our population centers—operation and maintenance support, transportation systems, and recreation programs—were not being met by existing Federal programs.

We were informed by Department officials that, because of a new Administration policy, Federal recreation agencies will no longer have a direct role in acquiring and managing urban recreation projects. The Office of Management and Budget deleted urban recreation planning funds from the BOR budget, and general recreation funds from the Forest Service's LWCF request. The LWCF grant program and the surplus property program, both of which are administered by BOR, will continue to assist State and local governments in acquiring and developing urban recreation projects. In addition, financial assistance provided by the State and Local Fiscal Assistance Act of 1972 (general revenue sharing) may be used by State and local governments to operate and maintain these projects. As a result, we are deferring further review efforts in this area until the new policy and the revenue sharing program have had a reasonable time to function.

Many local governments have reported that parks and other recreation facilities will receive a high priority when they consider the use to be made of revenue sharing funds. We suggest that BOR monitor the extent to which revenue sharing funds are used for recreation purposes in the large metropolitan areas to determine if the recreation needs of these areas are actually being met and, if necessary, suggest appropriate action to be taken by the Federal Government.

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank your staffs in Washington, Philadelphia, Ann Arbor, and San Francisco for their cooperation during this review. I would appreciate receiving any comments you may have concerning the matters discussed in this letter.

Sincerely yours,

JOSEPH P. ROTHER, JR.

Joseph P. Rother, Jr.
Assistant Director

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