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# REPRINTS

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## Report of the Director of the Survey to the California State Park Commission

Frederick Law Olmsted [Jr.], December 29, 1928

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Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. began his career as a landscape architect at an early age and achieved major professional accomplishments while still in his twenties. He also retained and renewed his father's commitment to public service, and especially to the creation and stewardship of public parks. Olmsted, Jr. wrote the critical portions of the 1916 act creating the National Park Service, for example, which clarified that the "fundamental purpose" of national parks was "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." Throughout his career, Olmsted was actively engaged in shaping the policies of the national park system, particularly for Yosemite National Park. He also advocated for state and regional parks and planned the 40,000-acre "mountain park" system around metropolitan Denver beginning in 1912. But his greatest accomplishment in state park planning—and in fact one of the great accomplishments of his life—was the California state park survey, a portion of which is reprinted here.

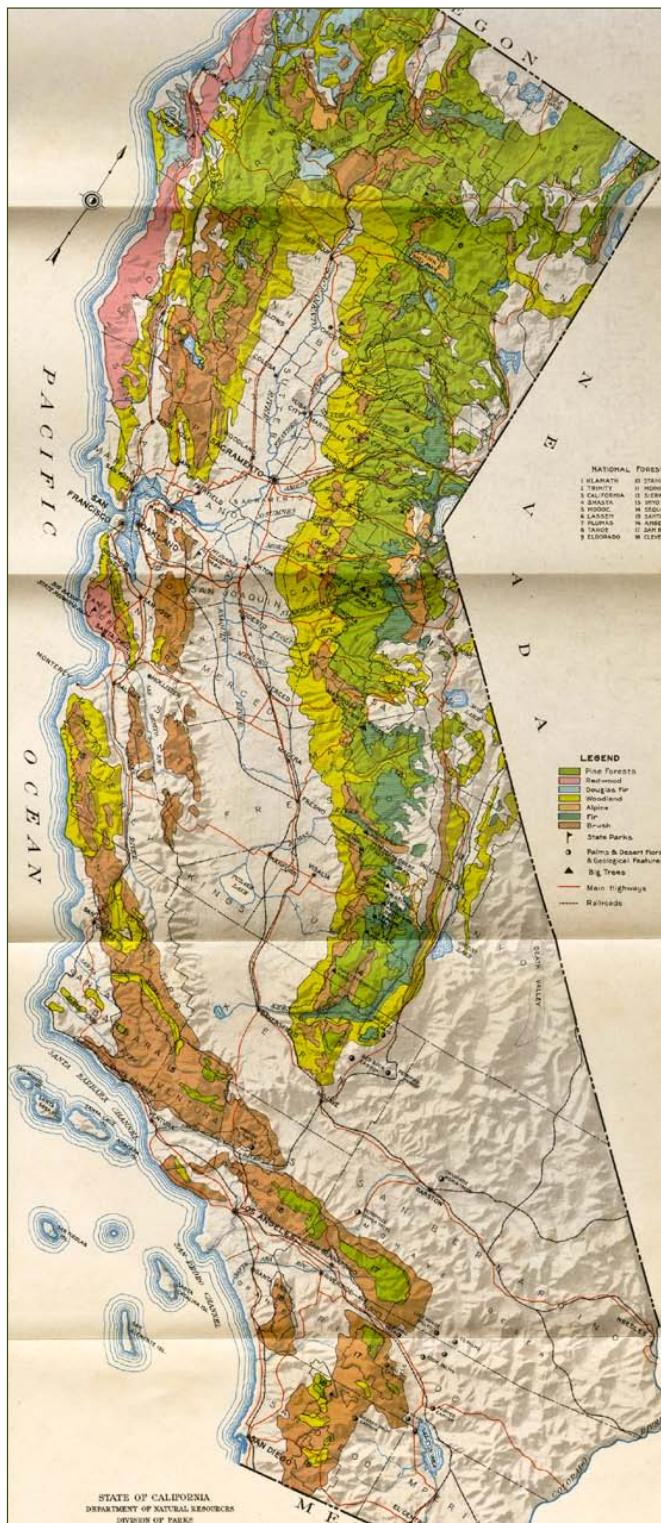
The movement to create state parks in California had begun earlier, mostly around concern for the remaining groves of Coast Redwoods. In 1927 the state legislature established a state park commission for the purpose of

planning and developing a "comprehensive, state park system" as a means of "conserving and utilizing the scenic and recreational resources of the state." The commission immediately hired Olmsted, who was already in California and well known to them as the designer of Palos Verdes Estates and other major subdivision projects in the state in the 1920s. Olmsted in turn consulted with leading California landscape architects, including Emerson Knight, H. W. Shepherd, and Daniel R. Hull. The California state park survey demonstrated a new standard procedure for planning a diverse park and recreation system over a large and geographically varied area. The state was divided into districts, and for each district Olmsted recruited a committee of volunteers and experts in



*Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. Courtesy of the Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, NPS.*

park design, forestry, history, and other fields. A state map was prepared at the University of California landscape architecture department that illustrated this comprehensive and scientific approach to the park planning through the use of color-coded zones corresponding to forest types and other information. In what became an influential precedent for state park standards, Olmsted



Map from Report of State Park Survey of California. Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. 1929.

specified that each park should be “sufficiently distinctive and notable” to attract visitors from all parts of the state, not just the local area, and that the parks should also preserve characteristic forests, beaches, mountains, and generally a “wide and representative variety of [landscape] types for the state as a whole.” These types included desert parks and historical parks, as well as other landscapes that expanded the purposes and goals of scenic preservation and state park planning.

As Olmsted and his regional committees of volunteers surveyed the state for potential park sites in 1928, a massive advocacy campaign was underway to pass an historic state park bond act as well as to raise private donations for the acquisition of land. Passed in November 1928, the act allowed for the extensive implementation of Olmsted’s plans, resulting eventually in what many would consider the finest state park system in the country. Olmsted had worked himself into exhaustion and had employed himself and his staff at Olmsted Brothers at far below their regular fees; but the timing was fortuitous. Not only did the bond act pass in California overwhelmingly, but also four years later, as the National Park Service was launched into an intense expansion of its activities through President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, the example and success of the California state park survey supplied a precedent and model for the creation and expansion of dozens of state park systems all over the United States.

Today, many of those state park systems, including California’s, face unprecedented challenges to their funding and even to their continued existence. Olmsted’s assertion of the value of these “scenic and recreational resources,” and the spirit behind the campaign to plan, fund, and create state park systems, are needed today more than ever.

—Ethan Carr, Reprints editor



## PART II

### Review of the scenic and recreational resources of California and of various means of conserving and utilizing them, of which means state parks comprise only one

#### A. General Considerations

The magnitude and importance, socially and economically, in California, of the values arising directly and indirectly from the enjoyment of scenery and from related pleasures of nonurban outdoor life, considered in the aggregate and without regard to the means by which they are made available, are incalculably great, and in this summary are taken for granted.

Some conception of the variety and extent of the means by which these values are sought, and of the aggregate price at which they are valued by those who seek them, may be derived from a brief and partial enumeration:

*(1) Automobile pleasure trips and tours.*

Riding for no other purpose than enjoyment of the pleasant out-of-doors through which one passes, or with that as a controlling motive combined with some other purpose or excuse, is one of the “major sports” of California. Statistical measurement of its

extent is impossible; but no less an authority than a member of the State’s Highway Commission has indicated his belief that half the travel on California’s highways is of this class. If so, substantially half the annual expenditures on the purchase, operation and servicing of California’s 1,880,000 automobiles, and on the construction and maintenance of some 7,000 miles of public highways, is one item gladly paid for obtaining values of the sort we are considering.

*(2) Other means of locomotion through pleasant scenery for the sake of enjoyment, as by rail, by boat, on horseback, or on foot.*

*(3) Commercially operated hotels, resorts, camps, eating places, stores, etc., used and supported by automobiles and others on their pleasure trips, and in localities where they stop for the prime purpose of enjoying outdoor life. Of this business also there is no adequate statistics, but it is enormous.*

*(4) Private vacationist dwelling places established and used solely or primarily because of the enjoyment obtainable by means of them, and mainly from the pleasantness of their outdoor environment; ranging from tents and little week-end vacation cabins, in canyon or forest or at the seashore, to palatial country estates.*



*Old Mining Town of Columbia, Tuolumne County.*



*Coast Line, Del Norte County.*



*Kings Canyon. Courtesy of Sarah Raube.*

*(5) That share of the passenger and freight business of common carriers, and that share of mercantile, manufacturing, agricultural and miscellaneous service businesses required for the creation, maintenance and operation of the above facilities.*

*(6) Other confessedly recreational uses (i.e. other than by automobile and by occupation of pleasantly situated temporary domiciles as above) of scenically agreeable places on the coast, in the mountains, in the forests, on the streams and lakes, etc. (bathing, boating, fishing, and other outdoor sports, nature study, and just plain quiet enjoyment of one's outdoor surroundings), through substantially gratuitous use of lands not privately owned by the users. This includes (a) lands publicly held for such use (as parks), and (b) lands held primarily for other purposes with which such use is not inconsistent (such as public forests and wa-*

*tershed lands, and such as timber or grazing lands, or vacant areas) which have agreeable landscapes and which the public enjoy either from neighboring roads or public places, or through being permitted to wander on them by sufferance.*

Lands held as public parks thus appear only as one minor subdivision, fractionally minute in area, of the vast aggregate of lands from which these scenic and recreationally values are even now derived in so large a measure as to make regard for them an important factor in management.

The kinds of values sought by such means have always been part of the joy of living for many people; but in our time, in America, there has been an enormous increase in the proportion of people who have time left for the pursuit of such values after earning the bare necessities of existence.



These values, together with others which directly make life worth living, as distinguished from things which are valued only because they can be exchanged for something one really wants, are the final things which economic prosperity enables people to buy. In California today people are using their economic wealth in the ways above indicated to buy values of this particular kind enormously, incredibly to anyone of a former age or another country. And they will probably seek to buy this kind of values more and more.

How far such values can be bought, at any price, by succeeding generations on California will depend largely on the degree to which the physical conditions which make



*Cal Barrel Road, Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park. Courtesy National Park Service.*

them possible are permanently conserved or are destroyed by the first comers through their wasteful methods of exploiting them.

The enormous development in California of the use of these scenic and recreational values of the out-of-doors has resulted in part from the economic prosperity of the people, leaving them time and means for such enjoyment, and in part from the lavish abundance of naturally favorable conditions of landscape and climate.

But there are signs on every hand that because of this very abundance (and of the increasing rate at which the favorable conditions are being put to use) careless, hasty, shortsightedly selfish methods of exploiting the natural assets of scenic value are rapidly killing the geese that lay the golden eggs.

To take a single type of this destructive exploitation: Every year thousands of “cabin-site subdivisions” and other residential and pleasure resort developments (of the types listed as (3) and (4) above) are being laid out in the pleasantest spots readily available as private speculations with the sole motive of making quick sales and “getting out from under”; and in a considerable proportion of cases *in such a crowded and unsatisfactory manner that before half of the lots are actually put to use the natural advantages of the spot for such use are in large part permanently destroyed and the place tends to become a rural slum*, in which the occupants fail to get in any satisfactory measure what they hoped and paid for. In every such case a good opportunity is wrecked, the more enterprising lot owners gradually abandon the blighted spot for a new venture in virgin territory, which in turn is apt to become similarly blighted because those who determine what is done to it lack either the *will* or the *skill* to use the opportunity other than destructively.

The procedure is identical in principle with such destructive exploitation of natural timber resources as converts

lands of potentially permanent timber productivity into useless barrens.

The most urgent concerns of the state in this connection are: (1) *to teach the great mass of well-intentioned people how to get what they want in enjoyment of scenic and recreational values, how to get it successfully* for themselves now and on their own initiative, and *how to get it without destroying the natural assets* on which the continued enjoyment of such values depends; and (2) *to curb and limit the activities of exploiters* who would destroy the birthright of their successors, no matter what its value, for the sake of a quick turn of profit to themselves.

The first concern of the state, then, is one of *public education*, including:

(a) Study and research as to the various good and bad methods by which use of scenic and recreational resources is and can be carried on, and (b) getting the results of such knowledge across to the people.

The second concern of the state, in this matter, *direct prevention of unwarrantably destructive exploitation* of such resources has many ramifications. The chief means of prevention are these:

(a) BY PROPRIETARY CONTROL

(1) *Parks*. Peculiarly valuable scenic and recreational resources of many kinds which under private ownership and management are specially subject either to destructive exploitation or to a narrow monopolization which makes their enjoyment by the ordinary citizen impossible, can most simply and effectively be protected against wasteful abuse by means of their public ownership and management in perpetuity as parks. To acquire and manage such parks is the prime function of the State Park Commission.



Morro Bay State Park. Courtesy Christy Edstrom O'Hara.

(2) *Other public holdings*. Lands now held or which may come to be held by the state and its subdivisions and agencies, and by the federal government, primarily for other purposes than the conservation and use of their scenic and recreational resources, can, and obviously should, be protected against the unnecessary and wasteful impairment of such elements of scenic and recreational value as they contain by a proper and businesslike regard for these values as by-products in their public management; and in case of the alienation of such lands by establishing reasonable conditions and restrictions for ensuring a continuance of the same general policy. This is now the policy of the U.S. Forest Service in management of the national forests, constituting the largest areas of publicly owned land in the state, amounting to nearly one-fifth of its entire territory.

But there are many other valuable public lands to which the principle should be systematically applied. The most familiar and widespread of these are the lands of the highway system, the location and boundaries of which, as well as their physical treatment, should be determined in considerable measure, as is now well recognized by the Department of Public

Works, by regard for the scenic enjoyment to be derived by the public from their use concurrently with their use for purely economic transportation.

Another notable example, as to which the principle has not yet been officially recognized, is to be found in the tidelands. The state received from the United States, in trust for the people, the entire coast of California up to "ordinary high water," and still owns most of it. This is a vastly important area of publicly owned land, the administration of which intimately affects the scenic and recreational resources of the state.

In this connection the State Park Commission can and should collaborate, in a consulting and advisory capacity, with the various responsible public agencies in charge of such public lands.

(3) *Protective restrictions or easements on private land.* In connection with the creation of the better class of residential subdivisions in America there has occurred within the last thirty years a notable development in the methods of applying a very old legal device, that of covenants entered into by the owners of land in regard to the manner of use of the land, to the end of guarding against forms of exploitation injurious to the community. Methods have been found for making such covenants reasonably elastic and adaptable to changing conditions, instead of attempting to impose a rigid arbitrary control by a "dead hand" as in the old days; and with these improvements in technique the method has become a far more valuable and practical device. There have been some beginnings

here and there of the use of this device by agreement between private landowners and public authorities: as where a park, parkway, or pleasure drive is laid out and constructed at public expense on a public right of way in a manner beneficial to the owners of abutting lands and the latter agree, voluntarily, as a matter of public spirit, or of enlightened selfishness, to subject their land along the borders of this public improvement to certain covenants. These covenants provide that the land will not be used in certain specified ways detrimental to the value of the public improvement and to the general attractiveness of the region through which it runs, but are so drawn as not to interfere with uses of the land appropriate to the local conditions. Such covenants have often been entered into, for example, by landowners along a given stretch of highway, requiring any buildings to be set back certain distances from the highway. In many cases, such agreements have been entered into for a nominal consideration, sometimes upon condition that similar easements are secured throughout the unit of highway in question; and in the latter case the required easements have sometimes been acquired from a recalcitrant minority by condemnation in order to make the whole project effective.

By patience and tact in negotiation and by the application of adequate technical skill, a great many landowners in California can, I believe, be induced to enter voluntarily into agreements with public authorities that will safeguard the scenic and recreational resources of their neighbors from all the most threatening dangers that attend wholly individualistic management. ■



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