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## Far from the Madding Crowd

Most of the remaining wilderness in federal ownership—some 50 million acres—lies in the National Parks, Wildlife Refuges, and National Forests. A “wilderness area” is, for administrative purposes, an area considered to be in its primitive or primeval state. It has no roads, and access by any form of motor transport either by land or air is forbidden. In a bipartisan bill introduced in the Senate by Mr. Humphrey and 17 of his colleagues, a wilderness is “recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”

The bill in question (S. 1123) is designed “To establish a National Wilderness Preservation System for the permanent good of the whole people, and for other purposes.” It represents the culmination of a long fight on the part of conservationists to get a bill to the point of a vote in Congress. The first similar bill was introduced in 1956, and public hearings were held in 1957 and 1958. As a consequence of the hearings, the bill was modified to meet some of the objections of commercial interests—miners, stockmen, lumberers, and oil drillers—as well as other objections of the Bureau of the Budget, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of the Interior. The bill was then reintroduced in 1958. After further hearings and additional revisions, the current version was introduced during the present session of Congress.

The current bill, if passed, will, among other things, make wilderness preservation a policy of Congress; it will allow the continuation of grazing in areas where grazing is now permitted at the discretion of the appropriate secretary, but will not allow extension to new areas; it will stop mineral leasing and prospecting unless the President determines that “such use or uses . . . will better serve the interests of the United States and the people thereof than will its denial”; it will leave the administration of the areas in the hands of the National Park Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Forest Service.

But the greatest change introduced by the bill is that the power of administrators (bureau chiefs and departmental secretaries) to add to, reduce, or abolish wilderness areas by executive order will be removed, and the final authority will be shifted to Congress. Any change proposed by an official will have to proceed by several steps: public notice for at least 90 days, hearings if demanded, and a report to Congress. If Congress fails to pass a joint resolution opposing the change after 120 days of continuous session, the change will take effect.

This bill is being considered today by the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. If it is reported out favorably, which seems probable, there is a fair chance that it will be passed at this session. We hope so, for it is the best compromise bill that is likely to be worked out.—G.DuS.

