Redwood Park: Squabbling on Details Delays Final Agreement

President Johnson's proposal for a Redwood National Park has not come very far in the eighteen months since he recommended the plan to Congress. No one, not even the lumbermen, now doubts that there eventually will be a park. But almost everything about the park—its site, size, and cost—remains in dispute.

Progress on a variety of park proposals has been negligible. The Senate Interior Committee has not reported out a bill, though it may do so by the end of this session. The House Interior Committee has just held its first set of hearings and plans to hold more in California after Congress adjourns in the fall. At best, House action can come no sooner than early next session.

What is holding things up? From the beginning, the park proposal has pitted a number of interests against each other. The consensus for the park's right to exist has resolved none of the basic conflicts. And in this persistent disagreement lie the reasons for delay.

The first struggle is between the conservationists and the residents near the proposed park—between those who want to save the virgin trees and those who want to sustain the lumber industry. The national park proposals will eliminate jobs and siphon off important tax revenues for local government. Despite federal studies that predict that the tourist business will eventually make up for the timber losses, and despite pledges of economic aid to offset ill effects, the residents remain unpersuaded. Nor does the powerful lumber industry, naturally enough, want the federal government taking away its land.

These interests won a powerful ally when Ronald Reagan became Governor of California. The Interior Department had reached a difficult agreement with Reagan's predecessor, Pat Brown, on the inclusion of two state parks in the new national park. The state parks are essential to the Administration's plan (*Science*, 30 September 1966), and Reagan, who had been scornful of the park during his campaign, had to be won over. Ensuing negotiations have narrowed the differences between state and national positions. Reagan, whose Commissioner of Resources is both a long-time conservationist and a past executive for a timber company, has supported the park in principle. Clearly, the talks have been conducted in good faith.

But the major obstacle to agreement has yet to be overcome: The state insists that the National Forest Service transfer its Northern Purchase Unit of Redwoods (already being cut under contract) to the lumber company which would have most of its land taken for the national park; the federal Bureau of the Budget demurs because this transfer would establish an "undesirable precedent" and encourage lumber companies throughout the nation to ask for woodlands as compensation if their forests are taken for a park. Negotiations continue, but the problem remains unresolved; until it is, the Administration's Mill Creek proposal—the joining of the two state parks with new purchases of redwoods—remains seriously weakened.

Settlement means a lot to the Administration because it needs a strong case to prevail on the second major issue of the dispute: the park's location. Ever since the Interior Department made the Mill Creek plan public, militant conservationists, led by the Sierra Club, have been arguing that the park should be located along Redwood Creek to the south. They want a larger park and insist that their site includes better groves of virgin redwoods. The main objection to this proposal is its high cost; the Administration, with war costs pressing all domestic expenditures, does not want to commit more than $50 to $60 million for the purchase of private lands. But the Sierra proposal has strong support; its bill has more cosponsors than the Administration's.

The split in the conservationist camp (the Save-the-Redwoods league, foremost in the preservation of virgin timber, is supporting the Administration) has, no doubt, delayed committee action and will continue to do so. Yet the Administration, without agreement from the state, is in a poor position to press matters. If it gives in to the state by allowing Forest Service land to be exchanged for private timberland, it helps itself and its opponents, who are urging that the Forest Service land be sold to absorb the higher costs of the Sierra Club proposal. The state could help the Administration by backing down on its demand, but why should it? It knows it is in a good bargaining position. Moreover, a retreat could be embarrassing to Reagan, who has already modified his position considerably, and it could cause problems in the state legislature, where lumber interests might block approval of the transfer of the state parks.

Viewed from afar, the situation looks hopeless. The tangle of conflicts is further complicated by long-standing traditions of the House and Senate Interior Committees. They do not like to sanction transfer of federal land to states in return for state cooperation in establishing national parks. The Bureau of the Budget, in its negotiation with California, has already made some commitments—aside from the question of Forest Service land—and these commitments might conceivably cause trouble.

The sponsor of the Sierra Club's plan in Congress, Representative Jeffrey Cohelan, has already scaled down the size of the proposed park, though he still insists on the Sierra Club site. In private, some major protagonists mention compromise. What this means remains unclear; no one wants to disclose the limits of his bargaining position. The issue is a tender one. The virgin redwoods, ranging in age from hundreds to thousands of years, inspire rigidity. Once they are destroyed, they cannot be replaced. Indelicate maneuvering might shatter any compromise talks and provoke a three-way congressional fight between opponents of the park (many of whom now support a very limited park proposal), the Administration, and Sierra Club backers.

This destructive conclusion, if it ever comes, must wait until next session. Right now, a stalemate prevails; everyone is watching for someone else to make the first move.

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