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THIRTY-SIX YEARS OF RECREATION PARTNERSHIP

Remarks by Ellis L. Armstrong
Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Department of the Interior
at 36th Anniversary Observance of the
Lake Mead National Recreation Area
Las Vegas, Nevada
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Thirty-six years ago two Department of the Interior agencies--the Bureau of Reclamation and the National Park Service--began a recreation partnership unique in the Nation's history. Tonight, the Bureau of Reclamation proudly joins its sister agency and you distinguished friends in marking the 36th birthday of this agreement which has helped set a standard for recreational excellence on water projects throughout the Western States.

As we gather here, let us turn through the pages of history and listen to the prophetic words of the first explorer, Lt. J. C. Ives, over a century ago which still echo through the canyons of the Colorado River. After navigating up the river through Black Canyon, where Hoover Dam now stands, as far as Las Vegas Wash, he reported to the War Department:

"It seems intended by Nature that the Colorado River, along the greater part of its lonely and majestic way, shall be forever unvisited and undisturbed."

But I am not blaming Lt. Ives for being so wrong. The area he saw then looked God-forsaken to him. He, or anyone of that time, could not envision the series of events leading to the construction of Hoover Dam
and the creation of Lake Mead. He did not know that in only a scant 12 years following his pessimistic report Major John Wesley Powell would lead an expedition down the Colorado River and thus start man to thinking about ways of making the mighty stream's resources available to make life better for man.

Lt. Ives had no way of knowing that during the first score years of the 20th century an engineer named Arthur Powell Davis would chart the river, pick out damsites, and recommend to the Congress that a dam be built in Black Canyon. That recommendation was translated to fact when the Congress passed the Boulder Canyon Project Act in 1928 and subsequently appropriated the money to build then the world's highest and largest dam destined to corral the unruly Colorado.

It is possible that few of our Reclamation forefathers who planned, designed, and built Hoover Dam could foresee the tremedous impact this pioneer multipurpose water project would have upon recreation along the Colorado River. They were concerned primarily with building a dam that would control and store the Colorado's floods, releasing water through the Hoover hydroelectric turbines in a regulated year-round flow to downstream farms, cities and industries.

Ironically, recreation was not even listed among Hoover Dam's benefits just as it was not recognized as a purpose of any of our early projects. Nevertheless, some of those early reservoirs are among the best fishing holes in the Nation, and provide outdoor water-oriented recreation opportunities to millions.
And so, man built Hoover Dam in the wilderness of Black Canyon which Lt. Ives first explored and the world has beaten a path to it. This dam and reservoir form the hub of America's first largest and most used National Recreation Area--Lake Mead--which has been visited by 82 million people since its establishment 36 years ago.

Next week we expect to record the 15 millionth visitor on the guided tour of Hoover Dam.

When Hoover Dam was completed in 1935, the Bureau of Reclamation automatically created a major tourist attraction. People from throughout the world began trekking in ever-increasing numbers first to the dam and later to the reservoir as its potential as a recreational resource became known.

The Lake Mead National Recreation Area was conceived in 1936 when the Congress passed the Park, Parkway, and Recreation Area Study Act. Money was subsequently appropriated to the National Park Service for the administration, protection, and maintenance of the recreational activities of the Boulder Canyon Project area surrounding Hoover Dam and its reservoir.

The Bureau of Reclamation--National Park Service partnership began on October 13, 1936, when the Secretary of the Interior approved an agreement between the two agencies which formally established the Lake Mead National Recreation Area. This agreement assigned responsibilities
for recreation to the National Park Service working in cooperation with the Bureau of Reclamation in carrying out its responsibilities in the operation of Hoover Dam and its reservoir for multipurpose water uses.

The agreement was expanded on July 18, 1947, to include Davis Dam and its reservoir, Lake Mohave, immediately downstream from Hoover Dam. The Congress further recognized the national significance of the Lake Mead National Recreation Area on October 8, 1964, by approving a law which made the National Park Service responsible for the recreation program.

The Bureau of Reclamation administers Hoover and Davis Dams and their reservoirs for flood control, river regulation, water storage and releases for downstream irrigation, domestic and industrial needs, and hydroelectric generation for the benefit of over 12 million residents in the Pacific Southwest.

Utilizing water areas of the reservoirs and the designated surrounding land, the National Park Service plans, prepares and operates recreational facilities for public use.

The Lake Mead National Recreation Area was the first of the eleven national recreation areas established on Reclamation projects throughout the West. Four are on the Colorado River Basin system and provided over seven million visitor days of use last year. It is an added dividend to the original purpose of Hoover Dam which was to bring the unruly Colorado under control and make it useful to man.
A prime example of interagency cooperation and environment is seen in the recently completed Southern Nevada Water Project. Reclamation designed this modern municipal and industrial water supply system with full recognition of the outstanding scenic and recreational values of the Lake Mead National Recreation Area. The intake works of this major water supply system are located in the heart of the most visited part of the area, yet it is out of sight to the 4-1/2 million recreationists who visit the area every year.

The boaters, fishermen, swimmers, water skiers, and other recreationists do not see any of the project's manmade works from the lakeside of Saddle Island. They do not see the pumping plant and subterranean intake tunnel from which the project's water is pumped out of Lake Mead.

The excellent environmental planning and design standards which were employed in this major water supply project that serves over 300,000 people in southern Nevada were fully coordinated with the National Park Service with the common goal to minimize any impacts to this unique desert lakeshore environment.

Also involved in development of the fishing resource is another sister agency in the Department of the Interior, the Fish and Wildlife Service.

It is rare indeed in this hot country to find a trout fishery such as exists in the upper reaches of Lake Mohave, thanks to the release of clear, cool water from the depths of Lake Mead. Certainly, there was no benefit such as this before Hoover Dam was built.
We have cooperated with the Nevada Department of Fish and Game and the Fish and Wildlife Service in building a refugium, fed by warm springs below Hoover Dam, to preserve the endangered Devil's Hole pupfish. All of these ecological treasures lie within the Lake Mead National Recreation Area on lands withdrawn prior to the construction of Hoover Dam.

During the 36 years of our association we have integrated our interpretative programs throughout the area. On the guided tour at Hoover Dam and the self-guided tour at Davis Dam, the Bureau of Reclamation tells visitors about the National Park Service's facilities and programs. Likewise, the National Park Service provides information about the two dams at all of its installations throughout the area.

Furthermore, the Bureau of Reclamation, whenever possible, has operated the water elevations of Lake Mead and Lake Mohave to benefit recreation, fish and wildlife while meeting its water and power commitments in the Pacific Southwest.

Al Jonez, who works as an ecologist on my staff in Washington, used to skin dive along the shores of Lake Mead to determine how the bass spawning was coming. To the greatest extent possible, we adjusted reservoir operations to provide optimum environment during the spawning season. It was a real "wet nurse" job for Jonez.

This type of cooperative partnership makes possible the maximum utilization of the West's resources for the benefit of man. We in the Bureau of Reclamation are proud of our involvement.

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