Editor
Daily Sentinel
Grand Junction, Colorado

Dear Sir:

Mr. William H. Nelson, writing in your May 23 issue, claims that three things are wrong with our proposal that thermal-electrical generating plants using coal be substituted for the proposed Echo Park and Split Mountain reservoirs.

It is Mr. Nelson, I think, who is ignoring the basic facts:

1) The primary purpose of the storage project is to produce power revenue to subsidize storage and irrigation. The U.S. Geological Survey admittedly does not have enough water-resource data to know how much storage is needed. If as much is needed as the Bureau of Reclamation wants us to believe, it can be stored behind a high Glen Canyon dam with some saving in evaporation loss.

2) If the much-advertised assistance to farmers and ranchers is properly to be charged to other citizens, including buyers, if any, of the tremendous blocks of power planned, as well as taxpayers all over the nation, then let it be shown exactly how much subsidy is needed and exactly what the nation may expect in return for the subsidy. If the farmers' proposition makes sense and there is assurance that they are paying all they can and that water conservancy districts in the region are paying all they can, then the subsidy should be forthcoming directly in the national interest. If the proposition is so poor that it must be heavily sugar coated by the Bureau of Reclamation's accounting methods (with taxpayers everywhere paying for the sugar), then the public at large has good reason to suspect the proposition as being unsound.

3) If creeping socialism would become "running socialism" if the federal government should propose to build steam plants to raise money to help farmers, then it must surely be jet-propelled socialism to expect the federal government to build a costlier power-producing system to raise money for the farmers.

4) As we understand it, the presently recommended participating project will bring new and supplementary water to some upper basin lands at an overall average cost of $1,000 per acre, for land which will be worth an average of about $150 per acre when water gets there. This $1,000 does not include the inevitable increase in final costs over the January 1953 estimates now being used. Nor does it include the hidden interest subsidy of about $1,000 per acre (under the Collbran formula by another name), assuming these projects can be paid out on schedule, rather than extended to 70 years as now proposed for the Frying Pan-Arkansas project.

...To explore, enjoy, and protect the natural mountain scene...
5) Possibly these steam plants could be privately constructed and operated with the provision that their tax revenues be appropriated for assistance to farmers. If the stockholders were local people, the costs and benefits would all be locally shared, and there would be the added benefit of steady employment for coal miners. This is merely a suggestion, outside the field of the Sierra Club, on which the club would take no stand, for it does not involve itself in the perennial dispute of private versus public power.

6) There is another basic fact that we all ought to think hard about. Neither Echo Park nor Split Mountain dam should be built now or in the foreseeable future because of the damage they would do to a splendid unit of the National Park System and their implicit threat to the entire Park System. We can keep an adequate National Park System only so long as we insist that continuing development of expendable resources stop absolutely at the boundaries of land dedicated in perpetuity to recreational use. The scant resources of ordinary commercial value within our parks can buy but a few years of continued mismanagement. Left as parks, these places can remain available to all men until our culture dies. And indeed, they will prolong its life.

There is urgent need in Grand Junction, in San Francisco, and all over the country to take a clear stand in support of the splendid American institution, the National Park System. Mundane men will not know how to take and enforce that stand. It will not please little men. As has been demonstrated in the 90 years since a park was first set aside for the nation, that stand requires grasp, imagination, vision, and statesmanship. I dare say that most of the people who ride through your city in those vista domes—and there are and will be millions of them—do so because they like the looks of this land of ours. Thirty million people a year visit our national parks and monuments and the number is rapidly increasing. This generation owes it to generations still to come to make sure that our national parks always contain the unimpaired best and not the dregs of the scenes that make America beautiful.

Sincerely yours,

David R. Brower
Executive Director