MEMO TO EDITORIAL WRITERS AND POLITICAL EDITORS:

You may be interested in the attached account of the defeat of the Upper Colorado River Development Project in the last session of Congress by Conservationist forces, and their plans for the future.

This report was given at the special conference of the National Parks Association on Wednesday, November 17th, 1954, in New York City.

NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION
SPECIAL CONFERENCE

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Remarks to the Press
by Fred Smith
Director, Council of Conservationists
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Before introducing Mr. Sigurd Olson, President of The National Parks Association, under whose auspices this conference is being held, I should like to give you a capsule of background concerning the reason we are here.

As most of you know, the Department of the Interior, the Bureau of Reclamation, and several Western Senators attempted during the last session of Congress to put through a bill authorizing the Upper Colorado River Storage Project. This was to be an elaborate series of dams on the Colorado River and its tributaries, running from the Arizona-New Mexico border, north into Wyoming. The dams were to create reservoirs for the purpose of supplying irrigation to lands in that general area, providing power to be sold through private power companies to local customers, and fulfilling commitments between the Colorado River states for division of the water. One of those dams, Echo Park Dam, would flood out a good part of Dinosaur National Monument, one of the few breathlessly beautiful, virtually untouched wilderness areas left in this country - and an area which is supposedly protected by law from invasion for commercial purposes. This is the reason conservationists are involved.

The total cost of this project has never been definitely established. The Reclamation Bureau, where they seem to calculate billion-dollar-expenditures on the backs of old envelopes, made several estimates during the last session of Congress, but there has never been any general agreement among interested parties as to which of these estimates, if any, is accurate. In the Senate's version of the Project, the first phase alone would cost over
one billion dollars, and some estimates of the final total cost go as high as fifteen billion dollars. Reclamation apparently takes the position that whatever the cost may be, it will largely be liquidated by the sale of power and, to a minor degree, water for irrigation.

The Upper Colorado River Project is not an invention of the present Republican administration. The project was born during the dam-building heydays of the New Deal. It knocked around the Bureau of Reclamation and Department of Interior for several years, without ever coming to a head. Then, in the last year of the Fair Deal, proponents put on an extra head of steam and attempted to get the project before Congress. This was circumvented, however, by Oscar Chapman, then Secretary of the Interior, who investigated the matter and concluded that it should be put into the deep-freeze long enough to make a thorough study, including an analysis of several suggested alternatives to Echo Park Dam.

During all the years that the Upper Colorado River Project had been discussed, there was always a hard core of Conservationists in opposition, led by such men as David Brower of the Sierra Club of California, and General Ulysses S. Grant III, a Conservationist who happens also to be a highly competent engineer with a remarkable background in the analysis of reclamation projects.

During the course of the campaign waged by this early group of Conservationists, Mr. Brower and General Grant suggested, and set about proving, that the Reclamation Bureau's own calculations did not prove the case for Echo Park Dam. General Grant pointed out that the case for Echo Park Dam was based wholly upon evaporation, and not enough is known about evaporation, by anybody, to prove anything by this means; Mr. Brower, on the other hand, simply stayed
up nights and checked the Bureau's arithmetic, using the Bureau's own figures - and was somewhat surprised to find that he didn't get the same answers. All this was done to prove that by the Bureau's own methods of calculation, any of several alternate sites would prove equally effective - in some cases more practical - and in the end would cost the taxpayers less money. I will get ahead of my story at this point to tell you that neither the Reclamation Department nor the Department of Interior has ever attempted to directly answer the Conservationists' assertions that alternative sites were at least as good; however, upon the urging of puzzled Senators and Congressmen, the Reclamation Department did finally agree earlier this year to check its arithmetic; and in a letter to the Chairman of the House Interior Committee, the then Under-Secretary of Interior stated without equivocation that the calculations made by the competent engineers of the Bureau of Reclamation were anything but competent. They were, in fact, off by hundreds of millions of gallons. The mathematics of the Conservationists turned out to be more nearly correct, and the case for Echo Park Dam was badly damaged.

Early this year, the Upper Colorado River Project was brought forward again, with the specific blessing of President Eisenhower.

Under-Secretary Tudor of the Interior Department immediately set out to make the further study called for in Secretary Chapman's report. But after some three days of investigation at the site, according to testimony before a Senate committee, he turned around and came back. The bill authorizing the project was thrown into the hopper under the auspices of the Western Senators, and obviously showed no evidence of having been further investigated; it was the same old project sidetracked by the Democrats as requiring further study.
Reclamation had written the bill, and for some unknown reason, the Bureau of the Budget had rewritten it.

From the standpoint of the Conservationists, matters were made even worse by the declaration that the very first construction project would be Echo Park Dam, which the Conservationists know would prove an opening wedge into the invasion of other national parks and monuments everywhere for commercial purposes. In the course of discussion, one Western Congressman pointed out to his colleagues that if the Conservationists forced Congress to eliminate Echo Park Dam, "it is an argument they will use against us for the next 100 years." The Congressman's frank admission that there will be future occasions to fight for our parks and monuments agrees with the Conservationists' certain knowledge of what lies ahead - and underscores our fear of Echo Park Dam as a precedent.

Obviously, the situation was growing critical for the Conservationists when the Western Senators and the administration lined up solidly against them without giving consideration to their conviction that there were highly practical alternate sites for the dam that would needlessly ruin a national monument. But by this time, virtually all of the well-known Conservation and nature groups had joined forces to prevent this invasion of one of the nation's most impressively beautiful areas - and to prevent the setting of a dangerous precedent. They coordinated their efforts and some were able to make their voices heard in many places - including Congress and the Department of the Interior.

Passing attention was called to this fact in the extended story about Secretary McKay which appeared last August in TIME Magazine. TIME reported:
"Thousands of protests against the project have hit McKay's desk. Reason: professional nature lovers, like Bernard De Voto, Richard Neuberger and Wallace Stegner, all of whom wear shoes and live in houses while writing about the great outdoors, have raised an outcry because the project would flood part of Dinosaur National Monument."

I have a telegram from nature lover Neuberger, who recently discovered some 285,000 other nature lovers in Oregon who were willing to pay enough attention to his campaign - probably the first purely Conservationist Senatorial campaign in history - to elect him over the determined efforts of the incumbent, aided by the Secretary of the Interior and the President himself.

Senator Neuberger's wire reads as follows:

"You can depend upon me to oppose commercial exploitation of national parks and national monuments in these United States. It is my belief there are sufficient alternative sites in Green River Area to make impairment of Dinosaur National Monument unnecessary and inadvisable. Do you think the strictures against me might be withdrawn if I invaded senatorial halls barefooted? If the Secretary of the Interior goes without any shoes, I promise to do so too. Otherwise, I'll wear either mukluks or bedroom slippers."

But to get back to my story, the result of the activities of Dick Neuberger, Bernard De Voto, General Grant, Dave Brower, Ira Gabrielson, Howard Zahniser, Charles Callison, and the leaders of perhaps fifty other organizations with literally millions of members resulted in the sudden realization that Conservationists can have considerable force when they are really aroused,"
determined, and coordinated. Speaker Martin recognized this when he said that the House would not consider the Upper Colorado bill, and that it couldn’t pass in any event, he thought, because of the opposition of Conservationists.

In fairness, however, it must be pointed out that the real influence of the Conservationists cannot be gauged wholly by what they themselves did. Perhaps even more important is the fact that they attracted the attention of others to the Upper Colorado River Project.

Congressman Kenneth Regan, along toward the end of the last session of Congress, announced that the persistence of the Conservationists had roused the interests of engineers, economists, and public-minded citizens generally, with the result that, for the first time, they really looked into the project. The end result of close scrutiny, he pointed out, did the project no good. The Engineers Joint Council, the Hoover Commission, Raymond Moley, and many other individuals and groups began to check calculations, to review the economic factors involved, to question whether this was the best possible use of the West’s valuable and limited water supply, and many other things that might have gone unnoticed but for the Conservationists’ unrelenting drive.

The impact of all this opposition during the last session of Congress was sufficient to hold up consideration of the bill by the Rules Committee in the House: and to force it to fall ignominiously off the end of the Senate schedule when it came time for adjournment. The bill was not defeated; it simply was not voted upon by either the House or the Senate.

We are here today because we have every reason to believe that a bill authorizing the construction of the Upper Colorado River Project will again be introduced in the next session of Congress. There are indications that it will
be virtually the same bill as was introduced last year. In this case the Conservationists who are here today are planning their coordinated efforts to see once again that the bill is not passed. We are convinced that we can do at least as well as we did last time, and it seems certain that we can have more impact simply because we have far more people on our side. Some of these are Most Important People. One of our new official champions is the highly literate Senator from Oregon who will be heard from on this matter; another, who did not support our side as a Senator, Ed Johnson, is now, as newly-elected Governor of Colorado, suggesting that the entire project be sidetracked and attention be concentrated on local dams that will supply water and do no damage to national monuments, Congressional tempers or Eastern taxpayers; and some of our most effective opponents in the last session of Congress will not be returning to Washington for the next session.

We want to make it clear, however, that we are not irrevocably committed to oppose the entire Upper Colorado River Project, even though some of us, as individuals, may feel that the project is unwise and perhaps incompletely thought through. As Conservationists, we are not opposed to irrigation, reclamation, dams, power projects or water storage.

In fact, a group of eleven prominent Conservationists within the last month dispatched a telegram to this effect to a meeting of Upper Colorado Project proponents then in session; the telegram said:

"The undersigned wish to reemphasize their opposition to proposed Dinosaur dams, and to reaffirm their sincere interest in a sound water conservation and development program in the Upper Colorado River Basin."
As organized Conservationists, we are vitally interested in the substitution of an alternative site, to replace Echo Park Dam. We must and will continue to oppose the entire Upper Colorado Project as long as Echo Park Dam remains part of it. The group meeting here today, representing the major groups of Conservationists in the nation, has taken a definite position which can be best described as follows:

1. We are opposed to any legislation that would authorize building Echo Park Dam or any other dam that would flood any part of any park or monument.

2. We are mindful of the extreme importance of water in the West and we look with favor upon any sound water storage system that can effectively utilize the Upper Colorado water; but we point out that the necessity for Echo Park Dam has never been demonstrated. It has only been asserted, and no effort has been made to demonstrate that the proposals for alternative sites are inferior in any important way.

3. We invite all citizens to join with us to make sure that areas set aside for preservation in the National Parks System are not needlessly invaded and despoiled.