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**The New Deal Origins  
of the  
Cape Cod National Seashore  
By  
Douglas W. Doe**

The Cape Cod National Seashore stretches along the Outer Cape through the towns of Chatham, Orleans, Eastham, Truro, Wellfleet, and Provincetown. The National Seashore protects over 26,000 acres from the developmental pressures that have transformed the rest of Cape Cod during the post-World War Two era. The formal proposal was released by the National Park Service in March of 1959, after the preparation of general surveys in 1954-55. Senators John F. Kennedy and Leverett Saltonstall and Congressman Hastings Keith introduced federal legislation on September 3, 1959, which became law on August 7, 1961.<sup>1</sup> However, the origins of the National Seashore concept are found in the New Deal planning of the National Resources Board and the National Park Service.

Franklin D. Roosevelt created the National Resources Board (N.R.B.) by Executive Order in June of 1934, to succeed the National Planning Board (N.P.B) at the request of the, Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes, and others within the administration. Ickes had established the N.P.B. in July of 1933, within the Public Works Administration, which was established under the authority of the

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<sup>1</sup> The story of the Seashore's creation is told in Francis P. Burling's *The Birth of the Cape Cod National Seashore* (Plymouth, Mass., 1978).

National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933. A central charge of the N.R.B. was to bring long-term planning and coordination to the government's burgeoning New Deal programs concerning the nation's natural resources.<sup>2</sup>

The Board operated under the direction of its Executive Secretary, Charles W. Eliot II, until its abolition in 1943. Eliot, the grandson and namesake of the President of Harvard University, served as Director of Planning for the National Capital Park and Planning Commission for seven years before his service on the Board. His uncle, Charles Eliot, was a visionary landscape architect who led the efforts to establish Boston's Metropolitan Park Commission in 1893.<sup>3</sup>

The N.R.B. submitted its report to the President on December 1, 1934.<sup>4</sup> Comprised of two volumes and multiple supplements the report covered "land use, water use, minerals and related public works." The report asserted that it laid "the basis of a comprehensive long-range national policy for conservation and development of our fabulous natural resources."<sup>5</sup>

The authors of the recreation section of the report, drawn from the N.R.B. and the National Park Service, asserted that it was a state's responsibility to meet the recreational needs of its people through city, county, metropolitan, and state parks. The growth of the large metropolitan population centers between the East Coast and the Great Lakes led the N.R.B. to find that recreational needs had been "profoundly affected by the tremendous shift from agricultural to

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<sup>2</sup> T. H. Watkins, *Righteous Pilgrim: The Life and Times of Harold L. Ickes, 1874-1952* (New York, 1990) , 377-378; Marion Clawson, *New Deal Planning: The National Planning Board* (Baltimore, 1981), pp. 41-49. The N.R.B. is best known by the name National Resources Planning Board, created by Presidential Reorganization Plan No. 1, April 3, 1939. See Clawson, *New Deal*, pp. 41-49.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Kay Holtz, "Charles Eliot," *The Nation*, May 17, 1993, 676-678; Clawson, *New Deal*, p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> National Resources Board, *A Report on National Planning and Public Works in Relation to Natural Resources and Including Land Use and Water Resources, with Findings and Recommendations* (Washington, D.C., 1934).

<sup>5</sup> N.R.B., *Land Use*, p. v.

industrial, commercial, and professional occupations and the resultant concentrations of populations.”<sup>6</sup>

The N.R.B. recognized the growing recreation industries of Cape Cod, Florida, California, and the Rocky Mountains. The locations were available to those with the means and leisure time to take advantage of facilities which afforded "privacy and exclusive use." However, the report recognized

that this same privacy may often interfere with the public's fair and proper sharing in the enjoyment of natural wonders and opportunities for recreation, and that cost may prevent a large proportion of our citizens from participating in types of recreation which involve distant areas or contact with fine scenery or historic sites. In those cases the public must control private activities or provide public facilities....<sup>7</sup>

A "primary concern" of any recreational planning "should be the health and enjoyment of urban wage earners." To that end the N.R.B. believed that the "reservation of beaches" should receive "special attention" for the benefit of the expanding metropolitan areas along the coastlines of the country.<sup>8</sup>

A supplemental report prepared by the National Park Service expanded on the theme:

Sea coasts have a recreational value of unique and matchless character. The recreational value of beaches is of the highest order for several obvious reasons. The inspirational element is of such compelling order that even persons who are not ordinarily stirred by

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 145-147, 218.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

manifestations of nature, experience a stir of emotion  
when they come upon the shores of the ocean.<sup>9</sup>

The report recommended that public facilities along the coasts be "enlarged and developed" because such facilities were "seriously lacking." The report did not recommend the acquisition of National Beaches.<sup>10</sup>

The report's concept of "recreation" at the beach was not limited to beach blankets, umbrellas and swimming. A broader definition was sought that included "spiritual and mental stimulation and exercise as well as physical activity." Recreation was that which was "recreative of the individual, the community, or the Nation."<sup>11</sup>

Recreation was held to be an important component of "farsighted planning" for a nation with an expanding urban population mired in the depths of the Depression. Declining employment and shorter work hours led to an increase in "leisure" time, as the N.R.B. described the situation:

This leisure can be made of value in raising the physical, cultural, and spiritual level of the American people if proper provision is made for its use and if it is guided into proper channels. Failure to provide for it properly throws the doors wide open to every antisocial influence.<sup>12</sup>

The N.R.B.'s call for public beaches combined concern over maintaining access to the shore with an awareness of the social consequences of industrialization on the country's changing population.

The shift from the concept of "public beaches" to "National Seashores" is entwined with the career of Conrad L. Wirth, Director of the National Park Service from 1951 to 1964. Wirth graduated from the Massachusetts Agricultural College in 1923 as a landscape architect, and

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<sup>9</sup> Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Recreational Use of Land in the United States: Part XI of the Report on Land Planning* (Washington D.C., 1934), p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 227.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 210.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

he entered government service in 1928 for the National Capital Park and Planning Commission. In 1931 he transferred to the Land Planning Department of the National Park Service, where he contributed to the writing of the National Resources Board report.<sup>13</sup>

Wirth oversaw the Civilian Conservation Corps within the National Park Service and served as the Department of the Interior's representative to the C.C.C.'s Advisory Board from 1937-1943. Wirth considered the C.C.C.'s main objective to be conservation, not relief. The C.C.C. undertook an ambitious construction and repair program that, according to Wirth, "made the difference between a well-managed park and one 'just getting along.'" The C.C.C. provided long-range planning and technical assistance to the states through the Park, Parkway, and Recreation Study Act of 1936.<sup>14</sup>

The National Park Service issued a report in 1941 as a result of the 1936 Act that mirrored the work of the N.R.B.'s Recreational Division in the 1930s.<sup>15</sup> Recreation entailed the refreshment of body, mind and spirit within which physical recreation was secondary to the protection of "inspirational qualities" of the areas administered by the National Park Service "whether based upon natural scenery, or scientific, historic or prehistoric values."<sup>16</sup> However, the majority of the National Park Service areas were in the Western states, beyond the reach of half of the population.

Yet a vacation in the out-of-doors in attractive natural or naturalistic surroundings, where a reasonable variety of recreational occupation may be obtained, is desirable for all and particularly for those whose limited means

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<sup>13</sup> *Cape Codder*, March 26, 1959; N.R.B., *Land Use*, p. 144.

<sup>14</sup> Burling, *Birth*, p. 5; Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Civilian Conservation Corps Program of the United States Department of the Interior, March 1933 to June 30, 1943: A Report to Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior*, by Conrad L. Wirth (Washington, D.C., 1945), pp. 2, 21, 30-31.

<sup>15</sup> John Ise, *Our National Park Policy: A Critical History* (Baltimore, 1961), p. 367.

<sup>16</sup> Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *A Study of the Park and Recreation Problem of the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1941), p. vii.

normally provide only limited recreational opportunities.<sup>17</sup>

Wirth shared this broad inclusive view of recreation and "got hell from the conservation people," for that implies "that you want more people."<sup>18</sup> The conflict between conserving natural resources and making them accessible to the people is imbedded within the Act that established the National Park Service in 1916.<sup>19</sup> The purpose of the National Park Service

is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.<sup>20</sup>

Conservation organizations such as the National Parks Association and the Wilderness Society criticized the National Park Service for building too many roads and for becoming too involved in "side issues" such as recreation and state planning. The conservation groups wanted the National Park Service to differentiate between the "primeval parks" such as Yellowstone and Yosemite and the recreation areas.<sup>21</sup> Wirth, at the center of the controversy by virtue of his position within the Park Service and his enthusiasm for the C.C.C., continued to explore the expansion of "recreation" areas.

Wirth succeeded in obtaining funds for a C.C.C. study of "possible public seashores along the coastlines of the United States."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>18</sup> Conrad Wirth, Interview by Robert F. Gibbs, Francis P. Burling and Charles H.W. Foster, November 4, 1975, transcript, Salt Pond Visitor Center, Cape Cod National Seashore, Eastham, Massachusetts, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> Ise, *Critical History*, p. 439.

<sup>20</sup> Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Laws Relating to the National Park Service and Monuments*, comp. by Hillary A. Tolson (Washington, D.C., 1933), p.10.

<sup>21</sup> Ise, *Critical History*, pp. 437-439.

<sup>22</sup> Burling, *Birth*, p. 5.

The study of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts recommended twelve areas comprising 439 miles of beaches to be established as National Seashores. Only one, the Cape Hatteras National Seashore in North Carolina, was authorized, in 1937. Federal funds could not be used to acquire land for the Seashore.<sup>23</sup>

The genesis of the national seashore concept has been directly attributed to Conrad Wirth by a former Associate Director of the NPS. "I would say that seashores were pretty much in-house, a Connie Wirth contribution." Their purpose was "recreation, but there was also recognition that there were natural values."<sup>24</sup> Yet another official believed "we had thought of the same sort of conservation for it [Hatteras] as the National Parks have."<sup>25</sup>

Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes stated in a 1938 speech that the purpose of national parks was

to maintain in permanent public ownership land areas of exceptional beauty and grandeur, scenery that exalts the spirit, mountains, canyons, and the forests about them, with the birds and animals that are native--and to make them available forever for the enjoyment of the people.<sup>26</sup>

He noted that only "a good swimming beach, and beautiful scenery" will draw people to a park more than fifty miles away, but that was "no reason for making a national park of a swimming beach" unless

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<sup>23</sup> Peter Healey, "The Legislative History of the Cape Cod National Seashore Act: How an Executive Agency Assisted in Resurrecting and Expanding a Dormant Public Policy" (Masters Thesis, Georgetown University, 1967), pp. 3-5.

<sup>24</sup> George Palmer, Interview by Robert F. Gibbs, Francis P. Burling and Charles H.W. Foster, October 10, 1975, transcript, Salt Pond Visitor Center, pp. 6-7.

<sup>25</sup> Benjamin Thompson, Interview by Robert F. Gibbs and Charles H.W. Foster, November 4, 1975, transcript, Salt Pond Visitor Center, pp. 1-2. Thompson was head of Land Planning for the National Park Service in the 1930s.

<sup>26</sup> Harold L. Ickes, "Our Expanding State and National 'Parks,'" an Address at the Dedication of Dr. Edmund A. Babler Memorial State Park, St. Louis, Missouri, October 10, 1938, Harold L. Ickes Papers, Speeches and Writings File, Container no. 424, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., p. 12.

"combined with some other valuable feature" such as abundant wildlife, especially if it was threatened with extinction.<sup>27</sup>

However, he modified his statement with a ringing declaration:

When we look up and down the ocean fronts of America, we find that everywhere they are passing behind the fences of private ownership. The people can no longer get to the ocean.

When we have reached the point that a nation of 125,000,000 people cannot set foot upon the thousands of miles of beaches that border the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, except by the permission of those who monopolize the ocean front, then I say that it is the prerogative and the duty of the Federal and State governments to step in and acquire, not a swimming beach here and there, but solid blocks of ocean front hundreds of miles in length. Call this ocean front a national park, or a national seashore, or a state park, or anything you please--I say that the people have a right to a fair share of it.<sup>28</sup>

The idea of the national seashores emerged from the incubator of New Deal land-planning as the synthesis of three concepts raised by the National Resources Board and the National Park Service. First, public access to and use of the ocean beaches must be protected against the monopolization of the shoreline by private interests. Second, the location of ocean beaches makes them ideal for use as recreation areas by an expanding urban population. Third, acquisition of national seashores provides for the preservation and conservation of wildlife, historic sites, and natural features along vast stretches of coastline. Such a synthesis raises the fundamental question of how to balance the need to preserve access and use of the shoreline with the need to preserve and conserve the natural resources present along the coast. The great primeval parks of the west were celebrations of nature's grandeur; the idea of a national

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-14.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

seashore had a practical purpose not found among the thermal pools of Yellowstone.

In August of 1957 Francis W. Sargent, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Natural Resources, sent Senator John F. Kennedy a letter outlining a National Park Service proposal for a National Park on Cape Cod. The park would run from Eastham to Provincetown, encompassing thirty-three miles of ocean beach and an "as yet undetermined acreage of plateau area consisting of great dunes, wooded areas, marshes, fresh water ponds, etc., overlooking the great beach of Cape Cod and the ocean." Sargent and State Senator Edward Stone were "very much in favor" of the idea and hoped that Kennedy and Senator Leverett Saltonstall would "support the proposal and introduce the necessary legislation to accomplish this."<sup>29</sup>

Kennedy's office requested information on the proposal from the Department of the Interior, which provided a letter explaining the results of a Park Service study conducted in 1954-55 with donated funds. Titled, *A Report on the Seashore Recreation Area Survey of the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts*, the study identified the Great Beach of Cape Cod as ideal "for the conservation of relatively unspoiled natural seashore areas for recreation and other public use." A more detailed study was underway by the Park Service "to determine the feasibility and possible extent of a National Park in that vicinity. Until this study is complete and recommendations are formulated, it will be uncertain as to what lands might be included or excluded." The study was expected to be completed in the following spring. A Kennedy aide wrote in the corner of the letter: "make file-Cape Cod National Park."<sup>30</sup>

The findings of the 1954-55 report were presented in a pamphlet entitled, *Our Vanishing Shoreline*. A survey of the twelve areas identified in the 1935 study showed that ten were now private and only one, Cape Hatteras, was a National Seashore. The cost of undeveloped beach land had increased from \$9,000 per mile to \$110,000 per mile. The report urged that "at least 15 percent of the general shoreline of the

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<sup>29</sup> Francis W. Sargent to John F. Kennedy, August 23, 1957, Cape Cod National Park, Legislation Files, 1953-1960, Box 663, Pre-Presidential Files, Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts.

<sup>30</sup> Department of the Interior to John F. Kennedy, September 16, 1957, in Box 663, Kennedy Library.

Atlantic and Gulf coasts be acquired for public recreation purposes." The recommendation required the acquisition of an additional 315 miles of coast line to augment the 240 miles already in public ownership out of the 3,700 mile long coast.<sup>31</sup> The recommendations for Cape Cod were presented in a supplemental report:

The Great Beach area has all the inherent qualities that are desirable in any major recreation area. Combined with a long sweep of beach and a big hinterland, the area is highly suitable for accommodating large groups of people with a wide range of recreational interests... [such as] bathing, picnicking, camping, hiking, nature study, boating, salt and fresh water fishing.<sup>32</sup>

The report acknowledged that the acquisition of the area "would, no doubt, be one of the most difficult and expensive land purchase projects of its kind yet undertaken."<sup>33</sup>

Land ownership across the Outer Cape was a confusing mix of secure titles, unknown owners, and owners not heard from in years and decades. Subdivisions were laid out on the ocean bluffs of Wellfleet and Truro at the turn of the century by developers, for potential summer residents. The grid pattern subdivisions created shoe box lots of 3,200 to

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<sup>31</sup> Cape Hatteras and the Acadia and Everglades National Parks comprised more than half of the 240 miles. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Our Vanishing Shoreline* (Washington D.C., 1955), pp. 27, 34. The Mellon family, through their Old Dominion and Avalon Foundations, provided the funds for the study and the publication of the pamphlet. Paul Mellon provided funds necessary for the acquisition of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore Recreational Area. Paul Mellon, with John Baskett, *Reflections in a Silver Spoon: A Memoir* (New York, 1992), pp. 372-375. In 1948 Mellon purchased property on Cape Cod at Oyster Harbors, an exclusive, private island development along Nantucket Sound. His neighbor, State Senator Edward Stone, was vice-president of Oyster Harbors, Incorporated, following its emergence from bankruptcy in 1936. Oyster Harbors, Incorporated, CTF #4330, June 2, 1937, Land Court Office, Barnstable, Massachusetts; Court Order for the Reorganization of Oyster Harbors, May 28, 1936, Book 7575, pp. 59-74, Registry of Deeds, Barnstable, Massachusetts.

<sup>32</sup> Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Great Beach Area, Cape Cod, Massachusetts* (Washington, D.C., 1955), pp.10-11.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

5,000 square feet each. "Whitecrest" in Wellfleet contained 484 lots along the ocean bluff next to the more than 1,500 lots of "Wellfleet by the Sea." Highhead in North Truro was the location of "Pilgrim Heights," made up of 346 lots. Though sold by the scores, the lots were not built upon except in a few instances. The land remained vacant, awaiting an improved transportation system that would provide access adequate for the needs of developers and their private beach subdivisions.<sup>34</sup>

In the post-war period, the towns took scores of lots for non-payment of taxes, especially from the old subdivisions such as "Wellfleet by the Sea." The lots were sold by the towns at public auctions, breathing new life into the hibernating subdivisions. The Park Service proposal for the Outer Cape would prevent the development of the old subdivisions along the coast.<sup>35</sup>

The 1955 proposal was a far cry from a 1939 C.C.C. study prepared by Thomas H. Desmond, a consultant to the National Park Service under the C.C.C. program. His sweeping proposal for a 30,000 acre park from Cape Cod Bay to the Atlantic was reduced to 12,000 to 16,000 acres within a narrow three-fourths of a mile wide strip along the Atlantic coast. Desmond proposed the creation of the Cape Cod National Seashore and Historic Parkway. The plan called for the acquisition of 38,000 acres, including Duxbury Beach, Sandy Neck Beach, and the land north of Eastham's Nauset Beach. The three areas would be linked by a parkway that would extend from Duxbury to Provincetown.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Plans for the subdivisions are held at the Barnstable County Registry of Deeds. See Whitecrest, 1898, plan book 34, p. 37; Wellfleet by the Sea, 1914/1920, plan book 1, p. 29 and plan book 8, p. 25; Pilgrim Heights, 1910, plan book 33, pp. 123-125.

<sup>35</sup> For example, Wellfleet took seven lots in "Wellfleet by the Sea" for non-payment of 1947 taxes of \$1.96. Sold by the town in 1950, the present value of the lots is \$172,200. Wellfleet filed over 200 tax takings in 1948 and the seven lots represent only two takings. Each taking could include multiple lots. See Book 691, pp. 216-456 and Book 767, p. 369, Registry of Deeds, Barnstable. The current assessment is from Assessors records at the Registry.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas H. Desmond, "A Proposed National Seashore and Historic Parkway," for the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service (Washington D.C., June 1939), c, 4; A parkway "is, in essence, an elongated park traversed by a toad.... Traffic other than passenger cars is excluded...." As an example, the Blue Ridge Parkway was built in the 1930s, connecting Shenandoah National Park with the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. National Park Service, *Park and Recreation*, p. 126.

Desmond described the fifty square miles north of Eastham as "wild, sparsely populated land, sea and bay shore, sand dunes and forest." He wanted all of the land north of Eastham purchased, except for the small village centers of Wellfleet, Truro, and Provincetown. Desmond, urging "the use of all possible means to achieve the preservation of the area," estimated the cost of the acquisition to be ten dollars an acre.<sup>37</sup>

The 1955 proposal was similar to Desmond's in that it did not extend south of Eastham. The study considered the Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge to be "extensive enough to support recreation activities without destroying its natural features," but did not include the area noting that Massachusetts was "negotiating with the Fish and Wildlife Service for its acquisition for public recreation." The estimated cost for the Great Beach area rose from Desmond's \$10 to \$625 per acre.<sup>38</sup> As the title of the 1955 survey makes clear, public recreation was the driving force behind the study. In the midst of the Depression, Desmond proposed the creation of a massive conservation area with recreational uses. The 1955 study, confronted by a huge escalation in acquisition costs and bewildering land ownership, proposed a coastal recreation area with the conservation of adjacent marshes, dunes, and woods. The maximum area considered was the thirty-three miles of coast from Provincetown to Eastham. The premature public release of the proposal and its dimensions created expectations among Cape Cod residents that were exceeded beyond their worst nightmares.

The National Park Service contacted State Senator Edward Stone in the summer of 1956, to acquaint him with the Great Beach proposal. Stone responded with interest and an offer to assist the Park service in "preserving and protecting the Great Beach area." The 733-acre Pilgrim Springs area of Truro was purchased by the state earlier in the decade because of Stone's efforts. An exchange of letters continued through the fall, culminating in Stone's visit to the office of the *Cape Codder*.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Desmond, "A Proposed National Seashore and Historic Parkway," c. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-2, 17; Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *A Report on the Seashore Recreation Area Survey of the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts* (Washington D.C., 1955), p. 49.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel J. Tobin to Edward Stone, August 28, 1956 and Stone to Tobin, September 3, 1956, L-58: Proposed Area-Cape Cod, February 1953 - August 7, 1961, National Park

Stone met with the publisher, Malcolm Hobbs, and the managing editor, Francis Burling, to bring the *Great Beach Area* study to their attention. Hobbs and Burling published the study's findings and boundary map on November 1. Whether Stone expected them to break the story so quickly is not known. An internal Park Service memorandum referred to the "inadvertent release of a confidential and very preliminary report to a local newspaper."<sup>40</sup>

The publication of the map served to create a level of expectation among the local residents. As it was, they did not like what they saw. Joshua Nickerson of Orleans considered the creation of a National Park on the sand dunes of Truro to be "fine," but questions were raised about the need to take the narrow upland woods area along the coast. The paper reprinted the map on page one in January, noting that the map "shows the maximum 16,000 acres of beach and upland which the service will recommend to Congress as a park."<sup>41</sup>

The Park Service began a detailed study of the Lower Cape in May that went beyond recreation to consider "biological, geological, archeological, historical, scenic and interpretative values."<sup>42</sup> A progress report written in September of 1957 outlined a park that represented a turn towards the Desmond proposal. The report envisioned a park stretching from Provincetown to Monomoy Point and crossing Wellfleet from the Atlantic to Cape Cod Bay. "The study team is now more convinced than ever that the entire area ... constitutes a unique landscape of natural significance worthy of park status." The inclusion of Monomoy represented a tactical decision as well as an indication of

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Service, Accession No. 07965E-0027, Federal Records Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Burling, *Birth*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>40</sup> Burling, *Birth*, p. 8; E. T. Scoyen to Ben H. Thompson, December 6, 1956, L-58, F.R.C., Philadelphia.

<sup>41</sup> Burling, *Birth*, p. 9; *Cape Codder*, January 10, 1957. The paper compared the proposal to the existing public shoreline from Provincetown to Chatham. Five-eighths of the shoreline was publicly owned, including the Wildlife Refuge and military bases in Wellfleet and Truro. The paper noted that the Refuge "will soon be made more accessible through construction of a road atop a sand dike across the Chatham cut-through."

<sup>42</sup> Burling, *Birth*, p. 10.

support from the Fish and Wildlife Service. If the Park Service acquired federal and state lands immediately, then

we will have a considerable portion of the proposed area in Federal ownership and consequently the park could be formally established much sooner and long before we have completed acquiring all the land necessary.<sup>43</sup>

Sargent was not aware of the boundary changes when he publicly expressed confidence that the western boundary would skip developments and not extend to Route 6, never mind Cape Cod Bay. When he learned of the changes in December, Sargent predicted that residents would be "up in arms."<sup>44</sup>

The 1957 report represents an important shift in the underlying foundation of the park. The decision to expand the park to Cape Cod Bay was the study team's master stroke. No longer a narrow recreation area, the park proposal became a vehicle for the preservation and conservation of vast areas of woodlands, islands, marshes, ponds, and valleys -- the length and breadth of the Lower Cape. Unlike the 1955 report, the progress report did not appear on the front page of the *Cape Codder*.

The National Park Service released the proposal for the Cape Cod National Park in March of 1959.<sup>45</sup> The progress report's turn toward Thomas H. Desmond's was affirmed by the final report and an accompanying supplemental pamphlet. The pamphlet disclosed that the

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<sup>43</sup> Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Progress Report - Proposed Cape Cod National Park Study, September 30, 1957*, Cape Cod National Seashore Library, Wellfleet, pp. 7-8.

<sup>44</sup> *Cape Codder*, August 8, 1957; Burling, *Birth*, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> The report was scheduled for release in the summer of 1958, but was delayed until the fall. Publicly, the reason was to conduct further studies. Privately, Sargent and Stone wanted the report released after the fall congressional elections, "lest the matter become a political football." Congressman Donald W. Nicholson retired in 1958. Regional Chief, Division of Recreation Resource Planning to Regional Director, June 25, 1958, L-58, F.R.C., Philadelphia; *Cape Codder*, June 19, 1958.

primary purpose of the Cape Cod National Seashore is to preserve henceforth for public enjoyment the scenic, scientific, and historic features that exist there.<sup>46</sup>

To achieve that goal, the Park Service abandoned the narrow recreation area presented in the 1955 report and embraced a 28,645 acre park, double the size of the 1955 proposal. The extensive studies conducted in 1957 and 1958

made clear that Cape Cod's charm is not confined to the shore alone. Heath, marsh, forest land and lake, each with its community of plant and animal life, also are basic elements of the Cape's distinctive character... Examples of each must be inclosed [sic] in the proposed National Seashore if it is to preserve intact this whole complex of natural features, essentially unaffected by surrounding land uses.<sup>47</sup>

The report embraced the broad definition of recreation held by Director Wirth and the land planning reports of the New Deal. A *Provincetown Advocate* editorial presented the reaction of many Cape Cod residents.

We have met but few who are opposed to preserving a strip along the outer Cape shore so that the Great Beach will be saved forever. But a great amount of the land included seems to have little or no recreational value.<sup>48</sup>

Residents had been given an indication that the Park Service was considering a larger park when Congressmen Edward P. Boland and Thomas P. O'Neill filed legislation in May of 1958 "based on the recommendations of the National Park Service." At the time, the final

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<sup>46</sup> Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Cape Cod National Seashore - A Proposal* (Washington, D.C., 1958).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Provincetown Advocate*, March 19, 1959. The editorial was found in a collection of newspaper clippings held at the Cape Cod National Seashore's Salt Pond Visitor Center Library.

report was expected in a matter of weeks. The bill encompassed a 30,000 acre park from Provincetown to, but not including, Monomoy.<sup>49</sup> However, even Boland expressed concern about the scope of the final proposal.

My purpose is to preserve the shoreline and the natural beaches for recreational purposes. I think there are solid grounds for limiting further the amount of land to be taken ... I do not desire - nor does Congressman O'Neill desire - to take homes or areas that are way inland from the beach.<sup>50</sup>

His remarks may indicate that he did not understand the implications of a 30,000 acre park or that he felt a strong political breeze blowing west from Cape Cod.

Director Wirth held two open meetings with residents on March 23 and 24. He explained the proposal, answered questions and listened to angry complaints as well as words of support. He left Cape Cod believing that "there were few who were basically opposed to the idea of a National Seashore."<sup>51</sup> However, the idea encompassed many variations, as the *Advocate's* editorial indicated. As the debate began, the *Dennis-Yarmouth Register* supported the proposal and offered words of caution.

If it [the National Park Service] allows one group or one town to whittle down the park in one area, other groups and other towns will expect similar compromises. Carried too far, the result would put the National Park Service in the position of proposing not a park of

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<sup>49</sup> Cape Codder, May 15, 1958. The two Democrats were roommates in Washington D.C. Boland represented Springfield, Massachusetts, and O'Neill took over Kennedy's House Seat. Boland was introduced to his bill by the National Park Service when he attended ceremonies at the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. Healey, *Legislative History*, pp. 25-27.

<sup>50</sup> *Cape Cod Standard-Times*, July 21, 1959.

<sup>51</sup> Burling, *Birth*, p. 14.

national significance, but a local beach of significance only as a recreation area.<sup>52</sup>

Park Service officials met with local selectmen to learn just what they wanted to whittle down.

The private meetings with local officials held in April and June reinforced the sentiments expressed in the *Advocate*. Selectmen and other town officials wanted the park restricted to the beach and a narrow strip of upland. The Park Service analysis of the April meeting with Truro officials can be applied to the other towns.

Most of the suggested boundary revisions can be traced to recommendations in the original report for the Great Beach area. This was thrown in our face with a statement to the effect that we have greatly expanded our original concept.... We had to explain that further study was necessary to supplement our original thinking which was considered preliminary and not a final determination.<sup>53</sup>

The expectations created by the 1955 study formed the foundation of the local opposition, led by closely aligned town officials and developers.

Under the slogan "Conservation, not Recreation," they turned the National Seashore concept on its head. They argued that conservation of the area was not compatible with the public's use of the land for recreation as outlined in the 1959 plan. In the words of Joshua Nickerson: "You can turn the lower cape into a summer recreation and amusement area for a million people, but cannot, at the same time, conserve its natural charm." Nickerson saw the National Seashore as the vehicle of destruction, not a roadblock. His solution was to restrict the National Seashore to the beaches, dunes, and marshes, and restrict its use to conservation.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Dennis-Yarmouth Register*, March 27, 1959.

<sup>53</sup> Regional Director to Director, April 17, 1959, L-58, F.R.C., Philadelphia.

<sup>54</sup> Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, *Hearings on the Cape Cod National Seashore Park*, 86th Cong., 1st sess., 9 and 10 December 1959, p. 391.

Nickerson's proposal rejected the National Seashore concept that emerged from the New Deal. By restricting the Seashore to the immediate shoreline, the proposal would have left thousands of upland acres open to developers, to the detriment of conservation efforts. Stripped of recreational uses, the proposal could not fulfill the access and social policy functions of a National Seashore. "Conservation, not Recreation" meant the smallest park possible used by fewer numbers of people.

The National Park Service followed former Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes's dictum that there was "no reason for making a national park of a swimming beach" without other compelling reasons. The Park Service found those "compelling reasons" among the woods, kettle ponds, marshes, and heath of the Lower Cape. By returning to its New Deal origins, the Cape Cod National Seashore protected the area's "natural charm" from the post-war development that has forever changed Cape Cod.

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