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THE NATIONAL PARKS
America's Best Idea

**UNTOLD STORIES FROM
AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS**

BY SUSAN SHUMAKER

GEORGE MELENDEZ WRIGHT

(PART 9, PAGES 173 – 193)

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GEORGE MELENDEZ WRIGHT

The thrill of being in the same meadow with an elk, no fence or bar between, reaches everyone, young or old. Without the scurry and scratch of a chipmunk along the bark or the call of a jay and the flash of its blue, the high mountain and the deep gorge would be cold, dead indeed. The visitor would not linger long after his first comprehensive gaze at awesome scenery if the vista did not include the intimate details of those living things, the plants, the animals that live on them, and the animals that live on those animals. —George Melendez Wright (Fauna No. 13)

George Melendez Wright was killed in an automobile accident on February 25, 1936, outside Deming, New Mexico. When he died, Wright was only 31 years old. His public career had lasted less than ten years, yet his impact on the National Park Service was enormous. In the second essay of his Fauna Series No. 2, published in July of 1934, he wrote prescient words that would be echoed decades later by a new generation of Park Service biologists (Harmon 9; Lloyd 13):

If we destroy nature blindly, it is a boomerang which will be our undoing . . . Consecration to the task of adjusting ourselves to [the] natural environment so that we secure the best values from nature without destroying it is not useless idealism; it is good hygiene for civilization.

In this lies the true portent of this national parks effort. Fifty years from now we shall still be wrestling with the problems of joint occupation of national parks by men and mammals, but it is reasonable to predict that we shall have mastered some of the simplest maladjustments. It is far better to pursue such a course though success be but partial than to relax in despair and allow the destructive forces to operate unchecked. —George Melendez Wright (Fauna No. 2 10)¹

Youth

Wright was born on June 20, 1904, into a wealthy San Francisco family. His mother, Mercedes Melendez, was a native El Salvadoran. The Melendez family dominated El Salvador from 1907 until 1931, controlling the presidency from 1914-1927 through several members (including Carlos and Jorge, two of Mercedes's brothers), ruling under a state of siege after 1917. Wright's father, Captain John Tennant Wright, was a native New Yorker and ship's captain, later relocating to San

¹ Although Fauna Nos. 1 and 2 were written by Wright, Dixon, and Thompson, I attribute the quotes to Wright, since he is the principal author and acknowledged leader of the team. This particular essay was originally presented as a speech on May 8, 1934, at the Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the American Society of Mammalogists, American Museum of Natural History, NYC.

Francisco. In the course of his business, he established a trading relationship with the Melendez coffee plantation. There, Captain Wright met Mercedes. The two married and returned to San Francisco to start a family. They had three sons; the youngest was George (Emory interview; bartleby.com).

Mercedes Melendez Wright died in 1906, when George was still an infant. She left him in the care of his father and great aunt, Cordelia Ward Wright, whom George affectionately called “Auntie.” After Captain Wright himself died in 1912, Auntie officially adopted George. Charles Wright, a year older than George, was adopted by relatives in El Salvador, where their elder brother John, ten years senior to George, had gone many years earlier to help manage the family lands. Although John and Charles, too, died relatively young, their families—and other Melendez relatives—still live throughout El Salvador (Emory 15; Lloyd conversation).

Wright spent much of his youth hiking around the Bay Area and, with his aunt’s encouragement, showed an unusually strong interest in natural history. He became an avid birder. With his knowledge of plants and animals, he served as natural history instructor for two years (at the age of 14 and 15) at a Boy Scout summer camp. Around the same age he backpacked alone through largely wild terrain along the coast from San Francisco to the northern boundary of California. Later, Wright was president of the Audubon Club and of his senior class at San Francisco’s Lowell High School. After graduating in 1920, he and Auntie moved across the Bay to Berkeley where Wright attended the University of California (Thompson 1).

At UCB, Wright majored in forestry under Professor Walter Mulford. His passion, however, was wildlife biology and in this he was greatly influenced by Professor Joseph Grinnell, one of the country’s foremost wildlife biologists, under whom he took a minor in vertebrate zoology. Grinnell was director of UCB’s Museum of Vertebrate Zoology and was one of the nation’s most consistently vocal advocates for scientific management of the parks. He regularly communicated with Park Service leadership, imparting his views on the role of habitat in the survival of species, the interrelationships of animal and plant life, and the importance of refraining from interfering with natural ecological processes. Grinnell had a special interest in Yosemite and in 1924 wrote, with Tracy Storer, a book on fauna in the park.² His theory of the “ecological niche,” also published in 1924, has proved to be one of the organizing principles of nature and his methods and teachings profoundly influenced his students—not just Wright, but other NPS biologists, including Ben H. Thompson and Joseph S. Dixon. Together, these men—led by Wright—brought Grinnell’s ideas into the bosom of the Park Service (“Significance” 46; Sumner 4; Preserving 86, 95–96).

It was at UCB that Wright earned the nickname “Togo,” a label that stuck with him for the rest of his life.³ It is not certain, but evidence suggests that he spent his summers taking to the backcountry, visiting Yosemite and other parts of the West Coast as his interest in wildlife research developed and matured. In the summer of 1922, for example, Wright served as an

² *Animal Life in the Yosemite: An Account of the Mammals, Birds, Reptiles and Amphibians in a Cross-Section of the Sierra Nevada* (UC Berkeley, 1924); Grinnell also wrote on Lassen National Park with Joseph Dixon and Jean Linsdale (*Through the Lassen Peak Region*. UC Berkeley, 1930).

³ Apparently, Wright was rarely called George. He was Togo to friends and acquaintances (Emory 35).

instructor of natural history, leading students on a Sierra Club “High Country Trip” (Thompson 1; Emory 35, 15).

Early Fieldwork

Wright’s first recorded field trip was during the summer of 1924. With fraternity brothers Carlton H. Rose and Robert Shuman, he traveled throughout the western states in his old Model T, nicknamed “Peter.” Visiting numerous wildlife areas and national parks, including Crater Lake and Yellowstone, Wright recorded the trip in a journal he called “The Perils of Ponderous Peter.” Many of the entries relate to Peter’s mechanical failures, including 72 flat tires; others reveal Wright’s interest in the natural world and his sense of humor (Emory 15).

At Montana’s Flathead Lake, he wrote:

Is there anything on this earth that approaches the heavenly state more closely than a night spent at the foot of a noble pine beside a beautiful lake? So endeth the longest day of the year. —George Melendez Wright, 6/21/1924

And a few weeks later, at Yellowstone:

I like the country very much. It is reported full of wild game. While cooking supper in the dark I made the grave mistake of warming the peas in a pot containing our dishrag and washing soap. We could not make a go of the soapy peas—quite impossible to keep them on the knife. —George Melendez Wright, 7/14/1924

Wright graduated with a degree in forestry in 1925 and soon was working as a field assistant to Joseph Grinnell. In the summer of 1926, Wright and Joseph S. Dixon, an economic mammalogist also working for Grinnell, were sent to Mount McKinley National Park. There, they spent 72 days collecting specimens and conducting natural history studies. On May 28, 1926, at 4 PM, Wright discovered a surfbird nesting on a rocky ridge 1,000 feet above timberline.

After racing back to the camp to collect Dixon, Wright returned to the site of the nest. The two men stayed at the site, observing into the twilight of the next morning. Wright recounted their night in his field notes:

Shelter provided by a small rock outcropping, along with a smoky fire of alder dragged from the little creek basin some distance away, helped to make our storm vigil more endurable. Hardly a scant hour had passed before it commenced to rain with an accompaniment of chill wind that fairly froze.

. . . Sometimes the rain would let up as a shifting wind turned back the clouds. Then a little light filtered down to show us whole troops of mist ghosts rise right out of the tundra and go chasing away up the valley. No doubt they were on their way to join the cloud ranks again. —George Melendez Wright, 5/28/1926

Wright was the first recorded person to lay eyes on a nest and eggs of that particular species; his discovery was widely reported in scientific publications (Thompson 1; Emory 17).

Yosemite

Wright joined the National Park Service in 1927 and was assigned to Yosemite as Assistant Park Naturalist. During the two years he was in Yosemite (November 1927 to October 1929), he took meticulous field notes. Ben Thompson, Wright's colleague in the field and co-author with Wright of both Fauna series, said in a 1987 interview:

Wright's observations were intense, but always with pleasure. At night, he was very self-disciplined about writing his notes. You know, when you're by a campfire, and maybe you're tired, and maybe it's cold, and damp and so on. It takes self-discipline to make yourself write those notes. He was very conscientious about that. —Ben Thompson, 1987 (Emory 18)

During his time in Yosemite, Wright assisted in the development of the museum in Yosemite Valley. In addition to his regular duties as assistant park naturalist, he wrote a number of natural history articles for *Yosemite Nature Notes*, taught field classes, and cared for his Auntie, who had moved into the Ahwahnee Hotel to be close to George. Cordelia Wright—who, by then, was called “Auntie” by all the park's rangers—died in Yosemite on December 19, 1928, at the age of 88 (Emory 20).

Throughout his two years in Yosemite, Wright and Park Naturalist Carl P. Russell frequently discussed conservation issues and the subject of how best to present park wildlife to the public. They encountered numerous problem in their work: Deer in Yosemite Valley were too abundant and tame; cougars and other big predators in the Park were scarce or nonexistent; black bears often raided campgrounds for food and were fed garbage each evening several miles down the valley from the village; a small remnant of Tule elk, native to the San Joaquin Valley, were kept in a paddock in Yosemite Valley, as an emergency conservation measure; hunting and trapping along the boundaries were affecting park wildlife adversely. A brief entry in his journal from September of 1928 indicates that these issues were of great concern to Wright. “The elk problem bothers me very much,” he wrote. “There are many sides to the question.” But the NPS had no program or staff devoted to wildlife issues. Thus the necessary field research upon which better wildlife management decisions could be based was not being undertaken (Thompson 1; Emory 21).

Wright's Proposition

Concerned about this almost complete lack of scientific data, George Wright conceived of a way to address the situation in 1928. The following year, he proposed that there be a wildlife survey office and wildlife biology plan for the National Park Service. Independently wealthy,⁴ Wright assumed all costs for the undertaking, including the salaries of his team members, their transportation and equipment, and all other incidentals. Wright would continue to pay for the program until its value could be proven. Ultimately, Wright paid for the program entirely until

⁴ Jerry Emory points out that, although of independent means, Wright was not enormously wealthy, as has sometimes been assumed. He contributed a substantial percentage of his inheritance to the project, a generous gift for one so young (Emory interview, 6/17/05).

July 1931, when the Service assumed half the costs. It wasn't until 1933 that the program was fully funded as a regular part of the NPS budget (Thompson 2; "Significance" 46).

Wright began his career under Stephen Mather, the consummate promoter, developer, and builder of the parks. During Mather's tenure, scientific understanding was considered unnecessary in the management of the parks. Although Olmsted—in his drafts of the Organic Act's mission statement—had promised to conserve wildlife within the parks, the National Park Service had done little to protect the animal and birdlife in the system before Wright's proposal. The policies of the Service focused on natural resource manipulation, aimed not so much at preserving wildlife as at preserving and presenting to the public *idealized* versions of nature, what Richard Sellars calls "façade management." Emphasis was placed on accommodating the public and ensuring their enjoyment of the scenery, resulting in a kind of selective preservation. Some elements of nature were promoted over others, leading to an alteration of the parks' natural conditions in an attempt to accommodate the other half of the NPS mandate: the enjoyment of the visiting public ("Significance" 47).

Horace Albright, soon to succeed Mather, wrote an article for the *Saturday Evening Post*, published in the fall of 1928, entitled "The Everlasting Wilderness," in which he equated pristine conditions with the absence of physical development. The vast area of Yellowstone, he argued, remained as "primeval" as it had ever been, "preserved forever in (its) natural state" simply because roads had been constructed through only ten percent of the park.

Wright argued, however, that the simple absence of development was far from preservation. Although roads had not penetrated many areas of the parks, other activities *had*, notably predator control, cattle grazing, and suppression of forest fires (Preserving 92–93).

George Wright, in the opening remarks of Fauna No. 1, elaborated on the need for more active management:

Intensification of the protective function . . . has not been enough. The need to supplement protection with more constructive wildlife management has become manifest with a steady increase of problems both as to number and intensity. . . .

Time proved that management of some sort would have to be invoked to save certain situations, especially as the parks were opened to thousands of visitors, causing a flood of fresh complications.

The conclusion was unavoidable. Protection, far from being the magic touch which healed all wounds, was unconsciously just the first step on a long road winding through years of endeavor toward a goal too far to reach, yet always shining ahead as a magnificent ideal. This objective is to restore and perpetuate the fauna in its pristine state by combating the harmful effects of human influence.

—George Melendez Wright (Fauna No. 1 4)

The fact that such a young newcomer was able, in so short a period of time, to introduce a new set of management concepts into a Federal organization and recruit a team of park-oriented biologists from around the country to carry them out, was almost unbelievable. In a 1987 interview with Emory and Lloyd, Ben Thompson summarized the situation:

[Wright's] ideas . . . weren't universally accepted at that time. There were a number of longtime employees, superintendents, chief rangers, and others, who liked the good ol' days of predatory animal control and corralling the ungulates so the public could see some of them, like the buffalo, and feeding the elk so they'd concentrate for viewing, feeding the bears at feeding stations and making a big show of it. There was all that to overcome. And to make progress with that, and have them still like you, was quite an accomplishment. Joe [Dixon] and I didn't have that kind of personality. We knew it. But George did have it. It was a gift of his character. He liked people, was outgoing, and generous, and honest, and motivated, and people sensed that. And they reacted to it. —Ben Thompson, 1987 (Emory 40)

Wright's personal fortune gave him direct access to the highest levels of NPS management. He gained the support of Albright who—although a dedicated proponent of recreational tourism—backed the survey and the subsequent Wildlife Division, at least in the beginning. But the Service was not immediately responsive. In September 1928, Assistant Director Arthur Demaray felt the work should not be done by the Park Service but under the auspices of the Biological Survey and initiated informal discussions with the head of the Survey to that end (Preserving 94–95).

Somehow the NPS administration was persuaded otherwise—probably by Wright himself, who believed strongly that the protection of park wildlife was the Service's concern:

Because of the nature of the task, it is inherently an inside job. Constancy to the objective can be made a certainty only by employment of a staff whose members are of the Service, conversant with its policies, and imbued with a devotion to its ideals. —George Melendez Wright (Fauna No. 15)

By November, Albright had been convinced. Wright's proposal prompted him to suggest that the Service develop its own scientific expertise, along the same lines as it had done with engineering and landscape architecture. In a memo to Mather, dated November 8, 1928, Albright wrote that the Park Service needed “a few specialists with scientific training who have strictly the National Park point of view.” In March of 1929, two months after assuming the directorship, he wrote to the Secretary of the Interior of the Service's need for scientists, “attached to the educational division,” where they could “gather data for museums, for all other educational activities, and for the other divisions as needed.” As director, Albright would write a series of articles—most likely drafted by the biologists themselves—in support of wildlife management in the parks. This endorsement of science as an important element in the Service's management of nature was a new position for Albright (“Significance” 49, 74; Preserving 87, 95, 98).⁵

It is clear that, without Wright's urging and willingness to commit his own money to the project, the biological program that he initiated would not have happened when it did, and possibly not for many years. And not a moment too soon: In a 1934 memorandum, Park Service biologist Ben Thompson wrote to Arno Cammerer, who'd accepted the NPS directorship in 1933, bluntly

5 Horace M. Albright, “The National Park Service's Policy on Predatory Mammals,” *Journal of Mammalogy* 12 (May 1931), 185–186; “Game Conditions in Western National Parks,” November 23, 1932, typescript; “Research in the National Parks,” *Scientific Monthly* (June 1933), 489.

countering the claims Albright had made in “The Everlasting Wilderness.” Having worked with Wright throughout the survey period, he could assuredly state that no “first or second class nature sanctuaries are to be found in any of our national parks under their present condition.” Even a park as vast as Yellowstone, he argued, didn’t have the area necessary to provide “protection and habitat unmodified by civilization” for carnivores and large ungulates. Cougar, white-tailed deer, wolf, lynx, and perhaps wolverine and fisher were “gone from the Yellowstone fauna.” Rocky Mountain had lost its grizzly population; Grand Canyon’s cougars were “almost extirpated” and its bighorn sheep “greatly reduced,” and “the entire ground cover and food supply for ground dwelling birds and small mammals” had been altered by cattle grazing. The grizzly and bighorn populations of Yosemite had been lost and its cougars were “almost gone.” In Glacier, grizzly were “very scarce,” bison and trumpeter swan were missing, and game species generally were “seriously depleted.” The story, Thompson added, was the same in the smaller parks (Preserving 92).

Wildlife Survey of the National Parks

With the proper NPS endorsements in place, Wright assembled his team: Joseph Dixon, the nationally-recognized field biologist with whom he’d worked in Alaska, was hired as economic mammalogist; Ben Thompson, another recently-graduated UCB colleague, came on board as research associate; Mrs. George Pease provided secretarial support. Wright’s own title was “scientific aide.” In its first years, the survey operated out of leased offices in the Union Trust Building in downtown Berkeley. The program was placed under the jurisdiction of Ansel Hall’s Education Division on the UC Berkeley campus, allowing Wright to stay in close contact with his mentor, Joseph Grinnell (Thompson 2; Preserving 95; Sumner 6).

The men outlined the purpose of their work in Fauna No. 1:

In addition to treating of the vertebrate natural history of the parks still needing basic surveys, (we) will cover research in one branch of science that is the very foundation upon which the National Park Service is built, namely the preservation of the native values of wilderness life. For it is this ideal above all else which differentiates this service from its sister services in government.

The rescue of this prized heritage of the American people has created unique problems in road construction, landscape architecture, education, and administration, but in no field are the complications deeper and their solutions more obscure than in conservation of the wild-life resources. The parks’ faunas have been extremely sensitive to the influences of civilization. (The Biological Survey undertakes) a general investigation of the vertebrate life of the national parks with emphasis on these human relationships. —George Melendez Wright (Fauna No. 1 2)

On August 17, 1930, as the Wildlife Survey Team spent its first season in the field, Horace Albright, then director of the Service, sent a memo to all park superintendents and managers of park operations:

One of the most important of the newer activities of the National Park Service is our wild life research branch, the work of which is being carried on by Mr. George M. Wright, Mr. Joseph Dixon, and Mr. Benjamin H. Thompson. Mr. Wright is personally carrying a major portion of the financial burden

of this work, owing to the fact that Congress has not yet provided adequately for it. Because of Mr. Wright's generosity and public spirit, we have been able to move ahead much more quickly than would have been the case had we had to wait until full recognition was given by Congress to the needs of this division.

. . . Let me say that there is no work going on in the National Park Service today that interests me more than the undertaking of Mr. Wright and his associates. —Horace M. Albright, 8/17/1930

During their three seasons in the field, the team made several circular trips throughout the West, usually beginning with southwestern wildlife areas and parks and moving northward and back out to the coast, ending at Berkeley and the wildlife office. Effort was made in each park to determine present wildlife conditions, to identify the reasons for any adverse changes, and to propose courses of action that would return the wildlife, inasmuch as possible, to its original, natural condition. It soon became clear that Wright was focusing in on a number of germane issues: hunting in and around the parks, predator control, what he called the “frightful” range conditions, and the state of specific wildlife species, particularly trumpeter swans,⁶ deer, elk, antelope, grizzly bears, black bears, badgers, martens, wolves, coyotes, and mountain lions. Special attention was devoted to rare and endangered species and an attempt was made to answer questions about the conditions and carrying capacities of park elk and deer winter ranges and about the causes of conflict between park visitors and park wildlife—notably black and grizzly bears—and what could be done to achieve the desired balance (Emory 24; Thompson 2).

1930 Season

The survey team spent April and early May of 1930 in Berkeley, preparing for their first season. As their first order of business, they designed a custom-built car and had it outfitted for prolonged periods of fieldwork. Then, in May, Wright began his notes:⁷

After numerous delays, which have delayed our starting nearly three weeks, we are on the way. No one can know how glad we are.

May 24

This is the first official field season of “was,” wild animal surveys in National Parks. This party consists of Joseph Dixon, economic mammalogist at the University of California, George M. Wright, scientific aide, U.S.N.P.S., and Benjamin H. Thompson, field assistant. We start in a car of the latest vintage (registering 160 miles only) which the members of the party have had built from an idea of their own. —George Wright, May 1930 Field Notes

In a 1987 interview, Ben Thompson describes the field vehicle in more detail:

⁶ Wright's observations of trumpeter swans in Yellowstone occupy several pages of his notes.

⁷ Wright's original field notes are in the collection of Pamela Wright Lloyd; the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California, Berkeley, has a complete copy.

It was a Buick Roadster and three could sit comfortably in the front seat. They cut the conventional back off, and built a truck bed on the back, like today's trucks. There was a water-tight compartment built right behind the front seat for camera equipment, books, and other things you needed to protect. Camping gear, pots, and bedding and everything else was under a tarp in the back. —Ben Thompson 1987 (Emory 25)

During their first season, Wright took careful notes on the extirpation of predator species in the parks. Although he eventually became a leading opponent of predator control and unregulated hunting in the parks, Wright was not opposed to hunting in general. He did not reprimand rangers after seeing them get off their horses or out of cars to shoot at a coyote. Wright simply observed and took notes. The same held true when park employees told him about the trapping of coyotes—which, on occasion, mistakenly killed an eagle—or when Yellowstone's "Buffalo Keeper" mentioned he'd been dynamiting badger dens (Emory 26).

On September 30, in Mount Rainier National Park, Wright wrote:

Hornquist at the Mount Rainier National Forest headquarters said in commenting on the hunting season for elk that it was necessary to clean them out as they were taking the range from cattle and sheep.

He said that grouse were scarce largely due to the large hawks which I took to be goshawks. He stated that he shot as many of the latter as possible. —George Melendez Wright, 9/30/1930

In mid-November, the team traveled from Mesa Verde to the Kaibab Plateau:

These four days were spent as happily as any I have ever known. The desert scenery, for color, and fantastic formation surely must be as fine as any in the world. —George Melendez Wright, 11/14/1930

1931 Season

On February 2, 1931, Wright married Bernice Ray, known affectionately as "Bee," in a Phoenix hospital, where he was apparently being treated after a bout with malaria. Bee frequently accompanied Wright into the field over the next two years, helping with observation and recording species lists. Wright's newly married status may have influenced the following entry in his notes, recorded just two months after the wedding in Carlsbad, New Mexico:

Once during our several visits I heard the "chiming" song of the Mearns [Montezuma] Quail. The several notes, all of the same quality and equally spaced are silvery clear and totally sweet, soft and yet penetrating. The song came from no direction. It was just on the air. About it there was a timeless quality. There was no beginning and never an end, just the voice of eternity in the wind on the desert.

I fight strongly against the natural inclination to interpret the actions of other animal species in terms of human emotions. But I could not watch the two mated pairs of Mearns Quail . . . for very long without being convinced that here were the perfect lovers. They were constantly together. The

male never letting his lady get more than a few inches from him. When they were perched out of their hiding places they nestled right against each other in the most peaceful satisfied manner. . . . When hiding in their little protection nests they snuggled so close that in the shadow it was almost impossible to distinguish that there were two birds. —George Melendez Wright, 4/26/1931

Upon returning to Yellowstone in May, Wright again began his love affair with trumpeter swans. Late in the month, he commented on an interview with Chief Ranger George Baggley:

In reference to the trumpeter swans he stated that he would have removed the otters from Trumpeter Lake last fall but for the fact that the whole thing had had too much publicity. He said that those things had to be done quietly and that is certainly true of any control measures practiced in a national park. —George Melendez Wright, 5/27/1930

Wright was intensely interested in trumpeter swans; he spent many hours hunting for nesting and feeding sites and monitoring their movements. On May 31, he monitored swans in a single location from 5:15 AM until 8:40 PM.

This day have kept a continuous watch over Trumpeter Lake to record the actions of a pair of Trumpeter swans during a typical day in the incubation period. I watched them entirely from a distance where they took no note of me in order that their movements should not be altered by human presence. —George Melendez Wright, 5/31/1930

Later that summer, in Glacier, he bemoaned the effects of ranching on the park:

This grazing and poaching [in the park] are harmful but to eliminate it would really mean starving the ranchers out. The only fair thing will be for the government to buy out their holdings. Glacier Park has poaching from ranchers on the west, railroad riff raff along the south, and Indians on the east. Undoubtedly this is why the game remains as wild as it does. —George Melendez Wright, 8/27/1931

Throughout 1931, Wright remained interested in NPS decision-making regarding park wildlife. On December 19, he wrote to Albright, opposing the corralling of wildlife in the parks—particularly bison—for public display. Wright and his fellow biologists argued that animal enclosures gave the appearance of “game farms” and were inappropriate in national parks. He reminded the director that the purpose of park wildlife “does not end with their being seen by every tourist,” and that people can see such displays “when the circus comes to town” (*Preserving* 118).⁸

1932 Season

In November, at the end of the 1931 field season, Wright returned to Berkeley and began writing *Fauna No. 1* with Thompson and Dixon.⁹ Around this time, offices were made available for the

⁸ Wright to Albright, 12/19/1931, Entry 35, RG79; Records of the NPS, National Archives.

⁹ According to Sellars, the three men—Wright, Thompson, and Dixon—had amassed 150 pages of the report

staff and its records in the headquarters of the NPS Research and Education branch on the UCB Campus. From that point forward, the workings of the survey were gradually incorporated into and increasingly financed by the branch as an official Park Service activity (Emory 32; Sumner 7).

Wright worked on the book in Berkeley until April 1932, at which point he traveled directly to Yellowstone. Back in the park, Wright found disturbing evidence of wildlife control. The following journal entry, marked “do not type” by Wright in his notes, was not reported in any detail in Fauna No. 2, but the practice of killing pelicans to improve fishing in the park was soon ended.

American White Pelican. The confidential report indicates that control work began in 1923 and has resulted in reduction of the colony from about 600 to 250. In '23 every young pelican was destroyed; in '24 and '25 all eggs were destroyed; in '26 83 young were destroyed & about half escaped; in '27 all young were destroyed; '28, '29, '30 no data available; in '31 75 young reported but only 43 could be found. Estimate is of 175 killed each year of control. —George Melendez Wright, 4/28/1932

The hand-feeding of bears in the park was also censured by Wright:

Last summer for the first time two grizzly cubs became tame and were fed by hand around Old Faithful. This will not do and must be stopped before it is well started or the bear problem will be worse than ever. —George Melendez Wright, 5/13/1932

In mid-summer, Wright left the field, presumably to attend the birth of his first daughter, Charmaine “Sherry” Wright. He was back in Yellowstone by early November. On the 13th, he was with Ranger LaNoue along the Gallatin River. It was hunting season.

With one possible exception all the men we saw were meat hunters and were not concerned with thoughts of sport. Most of them had come up from Bozeman. . . . To us the whole looked like a scene from other days, the era of the market hunter . . . In the camp on Buffalo Horn Cr. we counted 39 elk and 52 cars at 4:30 PM. A number of cars had gone out that day with their elk and others had only just come into camp. . . . The trees had beauty and order and dignity but they roofed a jumbled ugly human community. Tents, big and little, cars and trucks. Men and boys, and elk in the trees and on the ground all huddled together on the cold snow. . . . Here was an elk heart speared on a dead limb, there a sprawling liver hardened by cold to the consistency of the front tire toward which it seemed to flow and yet never reach. This same kindly cold rendered innocuous for the time elk legs, and head, and quarters and whole carcasses and tent interiors and human refuse. All was in a refrigerator but a thaw would have driven out the hardest man in camp. —George Melendez Wright, 11/13/1932

1933 Season

Wright began the year in Berkeley, presumably working with Thompson on Fauna No. 2. On July 1, 1933, Albright officially established the group as the new Wildlife Division of the National Park

by the spring of 1931, including brief analyses of most of the large mammals in the principal natural parks (Preserving 96).

Service. Wright was named division chief, with Dixon and Thompson as staff biologists. Shortly thereafter, Wright returned to the field, beginning with Platt National Park (now Chickasaw National Recreation Area) in Oklahoma in late July, continuing thereafter to Glacier and then on to Yellowstone for a stay that lasted through September. His second daughter, Pamela Melendez Wright, was born on October 17. It is believed that Wright also made a trip to Washington DC during this time period (Preserving 99; Emory 37).

1934–1936

By the end of 1933, Wright's survey had been completed. He now focused on recording the rest of his findings, to be published in 1935 as *Fauna No. 2*, and on convincing the authorities in Washington that proper management of wildlife in the national parks was a critical concern. He and his family split their time between Washington and Berkeley, eventually settling in DC in late 1935. Earlier that year, in January 1935, the offices of the Biological Survey had been officially transferred from UCB to NPS headquarters in Washington, indicative of the growing prominence in Park Service affairs of both Wright and the program he'd initiated. Wright and Thompson's offices were relocated to Washington, while Dixon remained behind at the Division's office in Berkeley (Emory 35–37; Sumner 7).

In addition to his duties in Washington, Wright did spend some time in the field during these years. He visited the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico with Harold Bryant in the summer of 1934. Later that year, he traveled to the Florida Everglades, again with Bryant and with Roger Toll and Oliver Taylor. Both these trips were undertaken to research the possibilities of establishing those areas as national parks (Emory 37).

Also in 1934, Cammerer—recognizing his substantial administrative skills—asked Wright to head the preliminary survey of the nation's recreation needs. The survey team included Conrad Wirth and NPS chief forester, John Coffman. Although he found the recreational field “quite alien,” Wright stated in a paper given shortly before his death that it was logical to place responsibility for recreational resources under the Service. He viewed these non-park units as a means of relieving recreation pressure on the national parks (Preserving 139; “Wildlife” 62).

At the beginning of 1936, Wright presented the aforementioned and a second paper at two meetings held simultaneously in Washington, DC. At a meeting of the National Parks Council of the American Planning and Civic Association, Wright spoke on standards. In his talk, he delivered a strong counter-punch to the likes of Robert Sterling Yard and other preservers of “the primitive”:

The remaining primeval areas of 1,000,000 acres or more should receive a unanimous vote (for national park selection). . . . Their very scarcity and the imminence of ruinous exploitation makes them of utmost value. . . . Shame upon any standard bearer so narrowly dogmatic as to stand in the way of the perpetuation of any one of these last precious bits of our primeval American heritage.

. . . The logical answer is more, not less, park area. Use is demonstration of need, and since more parks are required to satisfy the growing need, it would be hallucination to believe that creation of more parks would be a locking up or withdrawal of resources. Areas more valuable for

the satisfaction of national recreational needs than for anything else should be established as parks.
—George Melendez Wright, January 1936 (“Philosophy” 24)

Later, Wright concluded:

I no longer worry as I used to for fear the National Park System will be loaded with inferior areas. . . . What if a substandard area should slip in? This would not be calamitous. The failure to save Mount Olympus’ Forests, the Kings River Canyon, the Okefenokee Swamp, and a host of others just as valuable would be the real calamity. Let the friends of our national parks leave it to the National Park Service to safeguard itself against intrusion of trash areas and devote their energies instead to completing the parks system while there is still time to do it. The inclusion of Platt is not a burden upon our consciences; the failure to save one good example of our prairie grassland should be a very real cause for mental anguish.

The sound and the fury rage around such academic questions as to whether this mountain or that is the best of its kind, drowning out the echoes of the axes that eat their way into the hearts of four-hundred-year-old monarch trees on their slopes. When the argument is ended, neither mountain will be fit for national park status. —George Melendez Wright, January 1936 (“Philosophy” 25)

At the concurrent meeting—a Conference on the National Park Service—held in Washington, January 22–24, Wright spoke on his favorite subject: Wildlife in National Parks:

Among the more important national resources, perhaps none is more susceptible to the destructive influences of civilization than wildlife. Today its plight is the most miserable of any of our resources I am certain that there is no need to weary you with supporting evidence for that statement. An apathetic national consciousness condemned wildlife to walk the plank. —George Melendez Wright, January 1936 (“Wildlife” 58)

He later made a wry comment about visitor education, referring specifically to the feeding of wildlife in the parks:

It takes time to teach the visitors to our national parks that they are the ones who are short-sighted in feeding candy to a bear. After all, the average citizen expects more intelligence from a bear than he, as an educated person, has any right to expect. He goes on the assumption that if he feeds a bear two sticks of candy and does not want to give it a third, he is the one to say, “No, no.” And he believes that the bear is to be accused of an unforgivable breach of etiquette and lack of appreciation for the piece of candy if it takes all the candy out of his hand and takes the hand with it, perhaps. —George Melendez Wright, January 1936 (“Wildlife” 60)

Less than two weeks after the meetings, in February of 1936, Wright traveled with Roger Toll and other NPS officials to newly authorized Big Bend National Park. As members of a joint international commission, the men had been studying the possibility of establishing international parks and wildlife refuges, including Big Bend along the U.S.-Mexico border. There, Wright

received a new nickname, “Chapper”—a version of “Chapo,” a Mexican term of endearment for a short person. At 5’4” and with a friendly, outgoing disposition, Wright had no doubt made friends with his Mexican counterparts in the park (“Significance” 46; Emory 40–44).

On February 25, Wright and Toll were traveling on U.S. Highway 80 from El Paso to Tucson. Roughly seven miles east of Deming, New Mexico, the rear tire of an approaching automobile suddenly blew out and the car swerved into the path of the vehicle driven by Toll. The vehicles hit head-on, killing Toll instantly. Wright suffered massive injuries and died at a hospital in Deming. He was 31 years old (Emory 40–44).

Two National Park summits have been named for Wright: one in Denali, the other in Big Bend, where there is also a Mount Toll (Emory 44).

Fauna Nos. 1 and 2

Harmon calls Fauna No. 1 and Fauna No. 2 the “heart of Wright’s thinking.” In them, he points out the need for science-based management in the parks and demonstrates his commitment to preserving natural processes, a far cry from the established NPS emphasis on “serving up idealized nature scenes to visitors” (Harmon 10; Lloyd 13).

A landmark work, Fauna No. 1 (so-called because it was planned as the first in a series of wildlife studies) was the Park Service’s first comprehensive statement of natural resource management and represented a radical departure from past policies. It not only proposed perpetuating existing conditions, but—where necessary and wherever possible—*restoring* park fauna to a “pristine state.”

Recognition that there are wild-life problems is admission that unnatural, man-made conditions exist. Therefore, there can be no logical objection to further interference by man to correct those conditions and restore the natural state. But due care must be taken that management does not create an even more artificial condition in place of the one it would correct. —George Melendez Wright (Fauna No. 1 15)

Thus, achieving the ultimate goal would require not just scientific research, but judicious intervention and hands-on management. “It must be handled with skill in biological engineering,” Wright continued, “a science which itself is in its infancy.”

In both documents, Wright, Thompson, and Dixon made recommendations for scientific research, protection of predators and endangered species, reduction or eradication of non-native species, and acquisition of more ecologically complete wildlife habitats. In all of these initiatives, they were years ahead of their time (Preserving 96, 98; “Significance” 48).

Wright began Fauna No. 1, published in May 1932, with an ecological “call to arms,” brought on by a new situation: the presence of large numbers of visitors.

The park faunas face immediate danger of losing their original character and composition unless the tide can be turned. The vital significance of wild life to the whole national-park idea emphasizes the necessity for prompt action. The logical course is a program of complete investigation, to be followed by appropriate administrative action.

The unique feature of the case is that perpetuation of natural conditions will have to be forever reconciled with the presence of large numbers of people on the scene, a seeming anomaly. A situation of parallel circumstance has never existed before. Therefore, the solution cannot be sought in precedent. It will challenge the conscientious and patient determination of biological engineers. —George Melendez Wright (Fauna No. 15)

The team remained true to some traditional NPS attitudes, stating for instance that public use “transcends all other considerations,” but argued that the “most farsighted administrative policy” would be to “minimize the disturbance of the biota as much as possible.”

If an alternate means of providing a needed development which will be less disturbing to wild life can be employed, it should be done even if a larger expenditure of money is thereby involved. On unavoidably disputed grounds, the keynote to management lies in the choice of a middle course allowing maximum use for both parties to the conflict. Developments for the benefit of the visitor must not be unduly hindered nor should the wild life which he came to enjoy be destroyed. —George Melendez Wright (Fauna No 148)

Wright and his team argued that this work, if done, must be done correctly, with long-term restoration of the park ecosystem as the ultimate goal:

Meeting existing difficulties with superficial cures might be temporarily expedient and, in cases of emergency, necessary, but if continued would build up a costly patchwork that must eventually give out. It would be analogous to placing a catch-basin under a gradually growing leak in a trough and then trying to keep the trough replenished by pouring the water back in. The task mounts constantly and failure is the inevitable outcome. The only hope rests in restoration of the original vessel to wholeness. And so it is with the wild life of the parks. Unless the sources of disruption can be traced and eradicated, the wild life will ebb away to the level occupied by the fauna of the country at large. Admitting the magnitude of the task, it still seems worth the undertaking, for failure here means failure to maintain a characteristic of the national parks that must continue to exist if they are to preserve their distinguishing attribute. Such failure would be a blow injuring the very heart of the national-park system. —George Melendez Wright (Fauna No. 16)

Fauna No. 1 analyzed the specific ecological situations and crises in each park the team visited during the term of the survey. In each location, Wright, Dixon, and Thompson recommended specific management solutions and urged more research. They devoted a significant number of pages to the Yellowstone elk problem, a cause of concern since 1911, warned of continued range destruction, and urged control as well as further study of the situation. Of all their proposed solutions, the team most frequently emphasized the need to expand boundaries to incorporate year-round habitats for migrating wildlife. It was, they noted, “utterly impossible” to protect game in one season only (Sumner 8; Preserving 97).

The report ended with twenty specific suggestions for an NPS vertebrate policy. Two recommendations, Richard West Sellars argues, were fundamental: 1) That all management

decisions should be based on properly-conducted scientific investigation, including “complete faunal investigations . . . [conducted] in each park at the earliest possible date”; and 2) That every species should be left to carry on its struggle for existence unaided, as being to its greatest ultimate good, unless there is real cause to believe that it will perish if unassisted (Fauna No. 1 60).

All other recommendations, in effect, elaborated upon these two, although special attention was given to “the rare predators,” whom Wright referred to as “special charges of the national parks” to be protected at almost all costs (Preserving 97–98; Fauna No. 1 59–61).

Fauna No. 2, “Wildlife Management in the National Parks,” was published in July of 1935. In his foreword, Director Arno Cammerer wrote:

[Fauna No. 2] reports on the actual progress which has been made in wildlife administration since the establishment of the Wildlife Division. . . . It will serve as a guide to the park administrator in his effort to accomplish the purposes for which the national parks system was established. —Arno B. Cammerer (Fauna No. 2 4)

The report focused on the specifics of the problems and goals previously outlined in Fauna No. 1. It again discussed the Yellowstone elk situation, which was pronounced to be noticeably worse, and urged a radical reduction program through an annual slaughter of 3000 animals. Additions to Carlsbad Caverns were proposed and plans for the establishment of new research reserves were presented. Subsequently, 28 research reserves and ten national parks and monuments were designated between 1933 and 1940. After World War II, there was little or no further action, until the 1960s (Sumner 10–11; Preserving 113).

The Fauna series continued briefly after Wright’s death. Two reports—Fauna No. 3 by Joseph Dixon (1938) and Fauna No. 5 by Adolph Murie (1944)—focused on the animals of Mt. McKinley National Park in Alaska. Murie’s report, “The Wolves of Mount McKinley,” was instrumental in shaping national opinion against proposed predator control in the park and became a classic in the literature of vertebrate biology and wildlife management. In 1967 it was still required reading in many college classes (Sumner 15).

Wright’s Impact

Wright’s wildlife survey marked the National Park Service’s first sustained effort to conduct scientific research in support of natural resource management. His landmark analysis that resulted from the survey, *Fauna of the National Parks of the United States* (Fauna No. 1), was the very first report on natural resource management in NPS history. Its recommendations went far beyond preserving the status quo: the report advocated not just the conservation of natural resources but, wherever possible, the *restoration* of natural conditions in the parks (“Significance” 46).

Remarkably, in March 1934, less than a year after the publication of Fauna No. 1, NPS Director Arno Cammerer adopted the twenty recommendations on pages 59–61¹⁰ as official park management

10 These page numbers refer to the electronic version, not to the original report.

policy.¹¹ In a memorandum to all superintendents, Cammerer—who'd recently succeeded Albright—pledged that the Service would make “game conservation work a major activity.” He told the superintendents in no uncertain terms that Fauna No. 1's policy recommendations were “hereby adopted and you are directed to place [them] in effect.”¹² Within two years there were 27 biologists, then called “Wildlife Technicians,” on the Wildlife Division staff. Each was given a copy of Fauna No. 1 as a sort of guidebook for wild life management. For the first time, the preservation and restoration of resources was adopted by a government bureau and applied to an entire system of public lands. The recommendations of Fauna No. 1, in their scope and their widespread impact, were almost immediate, and were unprecedented in the history of American public land management (“Significance” 46–47; Sumner 9).

In 1987, Ben Thompson, when asked what made Wright so very successful in these endeavors, underlined his winning personality.

People reacted positively to him. I don't think he had any enemies. Wherever he went, very quickly he was welcomed. —Ben Thompson, 1987 (Emory 40)

Under Wright's leadership, the biologists in the Wildlife Division very rapidly made their opinions known to NPS management in the parks and in Washington. Sumner estimates that, during the 1930s, about half the biologists' work was focused on research and wildlife management while the other half involved review of and comment on development projects. Prior to the onset of World War II, he calculates that they produced roughly a thousand reports. In them, Sumner and his counterparts sharply criticized the Service for being “more at fault than many other agencies” in destroying natural values and for its “failure” to create parks as “independent biological units.” They described park roads as “infections” that stimulated incremental development along their corridors. They warned NPS officials about exceeding the “recreational saturation point” in the parks and—in a recommendation that was particularly alarming to foresters and park managers—advocated forest fire as a natural ecological element. Sumner himself vehemently opposed the construction of the Tioga Pass Road through Yosemite; others opposed sawmill development in Glacier and the construction of a shelter for campers at Grand Canyon's Clear Creek (Preserving 97, 108; “Significance” 48; Sumner 11).

Another significant element of the biologists' programs during the 1930s was the creation of “research reserves” with the parks: areas set aside for scientific study only. At the time of their creation, these reserves represented the most preservation-oriented land use category the Park Service had devised. The areas were to be kept free from all human intervention and influence, entered only in case of emergency and their locations kept secret, providing a picture of what portions of the park were like in their original, unmodified condition (Preserving 109).

In March 1932, Albright asked for the formal designation of research reserves and requested superintendents to indicate their locations in the parks in their five-year park development plans

11 These twenty policies were still in effect in 1967, when Sumner was writing.

12 Arno Cammerer, Office Order no. 226, 3/21/1934, Entry 35, RG79, Records of the National Park Service, National Archives.

(known within the Service as “master plans”). Within a year, reserves had been designated in Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Sequoia, and Lassen. Others quickly followed—in the Great Smokies, Mount Rainier, Yosemite, Rocky Mountain, and Glacier—for a total of twenty-eight reserves in ten parks. In practice, however, the reserves were not as successful as they might have been, primarily because the wildlife biologists were not involved in the selection of many of the areas. As a result, the reserves were often not satisfactory biological units. In Lassen, for example, the reserve was a mere strip of land three-quarters of a mile wide and five miles long; two of the Grand Canyon’s reserves were so close to the park border that keeping external influences out of the area was practically impossible (Preserving 109–110).

Richard West Sellars, in his essay “The Significance of George Wright,” argues that the wildlife biologists under Wright’s leadership—whom he calls a kind of “minority opposition party”—effectively reinterpreted the 1916 Organic Act’s mandate that the Service must leave the parks “unimpaired.” Wright and his group argued that the mandate required not only protecting the scenery, but using scientific, research-based methods to ensure that the parks were left ecologically intact, as well. The tension between management for aesthetic purposes and management for ecological purposes began with Wright and his wildlife survey, Sellars contends, and has played a major role in national park history ever since (“Significance” 47; Preserving 93).

The Decline of Wright’s Influence

Wright’s ideas flourished briefly during the 1930s, but were quickly replaced by a new interest in tourism. FDR’s well-funded New Deal programs, especially the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), made monies available to the Park Service in unprecedented amounts, making it possible to implement much of the park development that had been envisioned in master plans prepared during the Mather and Albright eras. These plans represented a continuation of traditional NPS values and goals, emphasizing recreational use and prioritizing expansion (Sumner 11; Preserving 100, 102).

The Service’s newfound interest in ecological balance in the parks was quickly overwhelmed. NPS biologists suddenly found themselves in an advisory role and spent much of their time reviewing and eliminating ecologically destructive CCC and related proposals before they could be activated. Prominent among these were proposals for new highways and truck roads into wilderness areas, control of undesirable animals, firefighting, and the elimination of park sections (including, in one case, an entire National Monument) for administrative convenience. Moreover, management of the parks’ forests was a primary CCC activity, as well, earning the organization the nickname “Roosevelt’s Tree Army.” The crews mounted aggressive campaigns to rid the forests of dead and standing trees, disease, and insects (Preserving 126–128).

These activities were in direct contradiction to the biologists’ recommendations in Fauna No. 1. Although they were given the opportunity to recommend ways of keeping impact at a minimum, Division biologists had limited involvement in updating and drafting new park master plans, despite Wright’s appeals to Cammerer for more input (Sumner 11; Preserving 100, 102).¹³

13 George M. Wright to Director, February 28, 1934, and George M. Wright, Memorandum for the Director,

Living in camps of 200 or more men, the CCC crews themselves often had an adverse impact on the parks. They sometimes vandalized park areas and purposely harassed park wildlife. Cognizant of the dangers inherent in expansion, Albright cautioned the superintendents in June 1933 that the CCC crews must “safeguard rather than destroy” the resources of the parks. He encouraged consultation with the Wildlife Division in order to keep potential damage to a minimum (Preserving 100).

In a twist of logic, Cammerer, Vint, and others in the Service frequently tied the building of roads in a “portion” of a park with the protection of wild areas, arguing that the concentration of development would create large undisturbed areas for the “relatively few who enjoy wilderness.”¹⁴ In arguments reminiscent of Albright’s assertions about roadless areas in Yellowstone, the roads thus became a “small price” to pay for ensuring park wilderness. With such large amounts of development funds available, Sellars argues, the rationale that development fostered preservation proved very useful to the Service (Preserving 107–108).

Ironically, CCC funding was also responsible for the rapid increase of wildlife biologist positions in the Park Service. At the time of Wright’s death in 1936, the Service employed approximately 27 wildlife biologists, 23 of which were paid for with CCC funds (Preserving 101).

The loss of Wright’s leadership, although not fully apparent at the time, marked the beginning of the decline of NPS science programs. The number of wildlife biologists gradually decreased so that, by 1939, it had dropped to nine. In contrast, the Service employed close to 400 landscape architects, engaged in the implementation of New Deal development projects. Although the Wildlife Division continued, no one had Wright’s ability to, as Lowell Sumner writes, “placate and win over the opposing school of thought” which came to feel that biologists were impractical, not focused enough on the visitor experience, and an overall hindrance to plans for large-scale park development (Sumner 10; 14).

As an example of the Service’s ingrained disregard for the biologists, Sellars recounts the “show-down” that occurred over Andrews Bald, a designated research reserve in the Great Smokies. When a windstorm knocked down hundreds of trees in and around Andrews Bald in April 1936, park superintendent J. R. Eakin, supported by the park’s rangers and foresters, wanted a cleanup. The dead and dying trees were unsightly and presented a fire hazard, Eakin argued, noting that “again” the Wildlife Division was “not concerned with fire protection.” The biologists, on the other hand, urged that the trees be left untouched; the windstorm was a natural phenomenon and cleanup would “thwart the objectives” of the research reserve. In a sharp reply to Eakin, Acting Director Arthur Demaray granted permission for clearance, but added that the Andrews Bald Biotic Research Area would thereby be abolished:

The reason the research area is now abolished is that you have convinced us you made an error in approving its establishment. Its apparent proper use is primarily recreational. —Arthur Demaray to J. R. Eakin, 9/4/1936¹⁵

December 13, 1935, Central Classified File, RG79, Records of the National Park Service, National Archives.

¹⁴ Arno Cammerer, “Standards and Policies in National Parks,” *American Planning and Civic Annual* (1936), 13–20.

¹⁵ Balds file, Great Smoky Mountains National Park files.

The Smokies example proved the vulnerability of the reserves to administrative preference and the tenuous place of research in the Service more generally (Preserving 105–106).

In much the same way, predators never truly became “special charges” of the Park Service. Although Cammerer and his policies were genuinely influenced by Wright, Murie, and others who advocated for their protection, Albright was never convinced. In an October 1937 letter to Cammerer, he advocated “open war” on the coyotes in Yellowstone, saying he would

. . . continue to kill coyotes on the antelope range for the reason that the coyotes are of no possible advantage in that part of the park, can rarely be seen by tourists . . . while on the other hand there will always be danger of depleting the antelope herd. It must be remembered that one of the animals most interesting to tourists is the antelope. —Horace Albright, 1937¹⁶

In a January 1939 letter to Cammerer, Albright expressed similar sentiments regarding McKinley’s wolves, saying he found it “very difficult” to accept the idea of protecting them in the “territory of the beautiful Dall sheep” (Preserving 121–122).¹⁷

In 1940, Ickes transferred the NPS wildlife biologists to another Interior Bureau, the Biological Survey. The CCC was abolished within a year of Pearl Harbor and the Service’s principal source of funds was cut. With the exception of Joe Dixon, Adolph Murie, and Vic Cahalane (who had succeeded Wright as division chief), all the NPS biologists were transferred back to Park Service activities that were considered more vital to the war effort than biology. Fauna No. 1 remained the working “bible” for all wildlife biologists throughout the war, but when the book went out of print shortly thereafter, it was not reissued. Once the guiding text, it became largely unknown to postwar generations of biologists and park administrators. Murie’s Fauna No. 5, “The Wolves of Mt. McKinley,” was the last of the Fauna series to be published for 17 years; no further orientation and planning meetings of Service biologists were held for 15 years. In 1955, when Mission 66 included no plans for a renewal of the biology program, Cahalane resigned in frustration.¹⁸ Lowell Sumner refers to the years from 1942 until 1963 as a “period of eclipse” for wildlife management in the NPS system (Sumner 10, 16–17; “Significance” 48–49).

Renewed Interest in Wright

Despite the rapid ascendancy of Wright and his wildlife biology program, the Service never moved far from its utilitarian base. The significant reason for this, Sellars argues, is that the biologists were not backed up by public demand. Fauna No. 1 stood virtually alone among national park policy statements. The wildlife biologists, left on their own without a public constituency specifically concerned about natural resource issues, failed to gain a commanding voice in NPS management. But, as the environmental movement began gaining momentum in the 1960s, Wright’s ideas experienced a renewal in the Service. Since that time, Wright’s thinking has

¹⁶ Albright to Cammerer, 10/18/1937, Central Classified Files, RG79.

¹⁷ Albright to Cammerer, 1/11/1939, Central Classified Files, RG79.

¹⁸ Cahalane was succeeded by Gordon Fredine who also worked long and hard for the resurrection of the Service’s biology program.

gained an increasingly more significant following and influence in national park management. Fauna No. 1 was the policy and philosophical forerunner to the 1963 reports generated by the Leopold Committee and the National Academy of Sciences—reports that sparked the Service’s move toward more ecologically focused park management. Today, Wright is widely recognized as the founder of scientific natural resource management in the National Park System (Preserving 147–148; “Significance” 49–50).

The George Wright Society, established in honor of Wright in 1980, is dedicated to the preservation and protection of national parks and their equivalents worldwide. The Society has become a major influence in efforts to establish and maintain ecologically focused national park management practices (“Significance” 50).

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