

A SURVEY OF THE RECREATIONAL RESOURCES OF THE COLORADO RIVER BASIN



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
OSCAR L. CHAPMAN, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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COLORADO RIVER BASIN

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A SURVEY OF THE
RECREATIONAL RESOURCES
OF THE
COLORADO RIVER BASIN

WITHDRAWN



CONTENTS

	FOREWORD	v
	INTRODUCTION	xvii
	SUMMARY	xix
CHAPTER I	THE COLORADO RIVER BASIN	1
	General description	1
	Life zones	6
	Boreal Zone	6
	Transition Zone	6
	Upper Sonoran Zone	9
	Lower Sonoran Zone	10
	Life zones in relation to altitude	11
	Life zones as modified by direction of slope and other local influences	12
	Direction of slope	12
	Moisture	12
	Air currents	13
	Mountain masses	13
	Fish life in relation to life zones	14
	Boreal Zone	14
	Transition Zone	14
	Upper and Lower Sonoran Zones	14
	Recreational resources	17
CHAPTER II	GEOLOGY	21
	General features and relations of drainage basin	21
	Green River Basin Province	21
	Yampa River Valley	21
	White River Valley	21
	Uinta Mountain Province	21
	Uinta Range	21
	Uinta Basin	21
	Colorado Plateau Province	21
	Outline of geologic history	21
	Regional features of northern portion	21
	Plateaus adjoining the Colorado River	3
	The high plateaus of Utah	3
	Navajo Country	3
	San Juan Basin	4
	Regional features of southern portion	4
	Plateaus on north side of Grand Canyon	4

Hualpai Plateau	41
Coconino Plateau	42
Mogollon Plateau	43
Defiance Plateau	43
Zuni Mountains	43
Eastern border lands of Colorado Plateau	43
Upper Colorado River Valley	44
Gunnison Valley	44
San Juan Mountains	45
Western border lands of Colorado Plateau	46
Arizona Mountain Province	47
Prescott Area	47
Mazatzal and Sierra Ancha Mountains	47
Verde Valley	48
Recent volcanic areas	48
San Franciscan volcanic field	48
White Mountain volcanic field	49
Uinkaret and Shivwits Plateau volcanic fields	50
Basin and Range Province	50
Arizona-Nevada corner	51
Desert ranges south of Lake Mead	51
East-west trending ranges of middle western	
Arizona	52
Southeastern Arizona ranges	52
Southwestern Arizona ranges	53
Colorado Delta and Salton Sink	53
Plan recommended for development of certain recreational features in the Plateau Province	54

CHAPTER III

PLANT AND ANIMAL LIFE	56
Recreational value of plants and animals	56
Plants	56
Unity of plants and animals	56
Animals	57
Status of plant and animal life	58
Original conditions	58
Changes caused by man	61
Farming	61
Grazing	62
Importance of topsoil	63
Difference between natural and man-caused erosion	63
Meaning of soil erosion to human welfare	65
Hunting, fishing, and trapping	66
Stream pollution	67
Remedial measures so far taken	67
Regulations	67
Artificial propagation	67
Refuges	68

	Soil conservation	69
	Range management	69
	Public education in conservation	70
	Wildlife research	71
	Restoration has commenced but lags behind knowledge	72
	Grazing a basin industry that needs stabilization	76
	Public information and more support for conservation are fundamental needs	77
CHAPTER IV	PREHISTORY OF MAN	79
	Early man in the Southwest	79
	Cochise Culture	80
	Ventana Cave	81
	Gypsum Cave	82
	Little Colorado River Terrace Culture	82
	Eden, Wyo.	82
	Mogollon Culture	83
	Hohokam Culture	84
	Patayan Culture	89
	Anasazi Culture	90
	Northern Periphery	96
	Modern Indian tribes	99
	Significance of archeology	100
	Effect of reservoirs on archeological remains	100
	Recommended program	101
CHAPTER V	FACTORS DETERMINING THE RECREATIONAL BENEFITS OF RESERVOIRS	102
	Location	102
	Converting natural lakes into reservoirs	103
	Reservoirs in arid regions	103
	Convenience of access	104
	Population of region	104
	Nature of site	104
	Plan of operation of the dam	105
	Effect of fluctuation in water levels on plants	105
	Effect on animals	106
	Water temperatures	107
	Fertility of the reservoir	108
CHAPTER VI	POTENTIAL RESERVOIRS	109
	Green River Division	109
	Upper Green River Basin	109
	Yampa and White River Basins	109
	Uinta Basin	114
	Price and San Rafael River Basins	114
	Grand Division	114
	Dewey Reservoir site	114

	McPhee Reservoir site	116
	Other reservoir sites	122
	San Juan Division	122
	Little Colorado Division	126
	Virgin Division	126
	Boulder Division	127
	Gila Division	127
CHAPTER VII	THE GRAND CANYON	128
	Bridge Canyon Reservoir Section	128
	Lands and agencies involved	132
	Bureau of Reclamation proposals	132
	Bridge Canyon Dam and Reservoir	132
	Marble Gorge Dam and Kanab Tunnel	133
	Proposed operation of reservoirs	133
	Effect of proposed projects on the Grand Canyon	133
	Bridge Canyon Dam and Reservoir	136
	Marble Gorge Dam	138
	Kanab Tunnel and Power Plant	138
	Suggestions for development of the Grand Canyon area	142
	Roads	142
	Development areas	144
	Bridge Canyon section	144
	Peach Springs Draw-Diamond Creek area	144
	Granite Park	144
	Toroweap-Whitmore Wash area	147
	Shivwits Plateau area	147
CHAPTER VIII	CANYON LANDS OF SOUTHEASTERN UTAH	149
	Location	149
	Present roads and trails	149
	Recreational and related values of the region	150
	Outstanding and unique scenic sections	153
	Gray's Pasture-Junction Butte area	153
	Elk Ridge	153
	Needles area	162
	Lands End area	172
	Hite area	172
	Hole in Rock area	173
	Wahweap area	173
	Goosenecks of the San Juan River	183
	Arch Canyon	183
	Fisher Towers	183
	Lands, ownership, location, and amounts	183
	Use of natural resources	184
	Water	184
	Other resources	185
	Administration	185

Preservation of existing features	1
Roads	1
Air travel and landing fields	1
Recreational facilities	1

CHAPTER IX	DINOSAUR NATIONAL MONUMENT	1
	Location	1
	Scientific, scenic, and related values of the monument	1
	Quarry Unit	1
	Canyon Unit	1
	Recreational values of the monument	1
	Proposals by the Bureau of Reclamation	1
	Echo Park Dam and Reservoir	1
	Split Mountain Dam and Reservoir	1
	Effects of proposed dams, reservoirs, and related structures upon national monument values	1
	Echo Park Dam and Reservoir	1
	Split Mountain Dam and Reservoir	1
	Other effects	1
	Summary	1
	Policy and plan for the national monument	1
	Conclusions	1

CHAPTER X	CONSERVATION OF RECREATIONAL RESOURCES	20
	Important recreational areas and sites which should be preserved and developed	20
	Wyoming	20
	1. Wind River Range	20
	2. Fossil quarries	20
	3. Fort Bridger	20
	Colorado	20
	1. San Juan-San Miguel-Uncompahgre Mountain area	20
	2. Elk Mountain area	20
	3. Park Range	20
	4. White River Plateau	20
	5. Gore Range	20
	6. Grand Mesa	20
	Utah	20
	1. Uinta Mountains	20
	2. Aquarius Plateau-Boulder Mountain area	20
	3. Monument Valley	20
	4. Nine Mile Canyon	20
	5. Poncho House	20
	6. Westwater Ruins	20
	7. The Old Cotton Mills	20
	New Mexico	20
	1. Manuelito National Monument Project	20
	2. Gila Primitive Area	20

Arizona	208
1. Coronado International Memorial Project	208
2. Meteor Crater	209
3. Fort Bowie	209
4. Kinishba Ruins	209
5. Clear Creek Ruins	209
6. Chaves Pass Ruins	209
7. Awatovi	210
8. Blue Range area	210
9. Mount Baldy—White Mountain area	210
10. San Franciscan volcanic field	210
11. Mogollon Rim area	210
12. Travertine Bridge	211
13. Apache Trail-Superstition Mountains area	211
14. Oak Creek Canyon	211
15. Kofa Mountains	211
16. Southeastern Arizona Ranges	211
Nevada	212
1. Hidden Forest	212
2. Gypsum Cave	212
California	212
1. Palm Canyon	212
2. Giant pictographs	212
Recreation centers	212
Colorado	212
1. Steamboat Springs	212
2. Glenwood Springs	212
3. Gunnison	212
4. Durango	213
Arizona	213
1. Phoenix	213
2. Tucson	213
3. Prescott	213
4. Flagstaff	213
5. Winslow	213
6. Williams	213
7. Wickenburg	213
Utah	213
1. St. George, Hurricane, and Springdale	213
2. Moab	214
3. Vernal, Torrey, Escalante, and Blanding	214
4. Kanab	214
Wyoming	214
1. Pinedale	214
California	214
1. Palm Springs	214
Nevada	214
1. Boulder City	214
2. Las Vegas	214

Roadsides	214
Scenic roads	215
Arizona	215
Utah	215
Colorado	216
Roadless areas	216
National and State parks and monuments and national forests in the Colorado River Basin	217

CHAPTER XI	LIFE ZONE MAP	220
	Methods used	220
	Acknowledgments	223

BIBLIOGRAPHY	224
------------------------	-----

INDEX	233
-----------------	-----

ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURE		<i>Page</i>
1	View west over Colorado River to the Orange Cliffs and the Henry Mountains	iv
2	The Wind River Mountains of Wyoming	2
3	Looking down the Green River Valley from La Barge, Wyo.	3
4	Canyon Lands of southeastern Utah—looking over the junction of the Green and Colorado Rivers to the Henry Mountains from Dark Canyon Plateau	4
5	The great southern desert—Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Ariz.	5
6	Boreal Zone—Lake Brennan, Colo.	7
7	Upper Sonoran Zone—Canyon Lands of southeastern Utah	8
8	Transition Zone—Shivwits Plateau	9
9	Lower Sonoran Zone	11
10	Trout fishing is excellent on the Colorado River below Hoover Dam	15
11	From Lipan Point on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon can be seen the Echo Cliffs and Navajo Mountain	15
12	Cliff Palace in Mesa Verde National Park, Colo.	16
13	Petroglyphs in the Needles area southeast of the junction of the Green and Colorado Rivers	16
14	Bonita lava flow and Sunset Crater	17
15	San Xavier Mission near Tucson, Ariz.	18
16	Gunnison River above Gunnison, Colo.	19
17	The Grand Canyon at the mouth of Whitmore Wash	20
18	Owachomo Bridge in Natural Bridges National Monument, Utah	21
19	The Green River passes through Split Mountain, part of the Uinta upwarp	26
20	The Great White Throne in Zion National Park, Utah	29
21	The Colorado Plateau	31
22	Grand Gulch in the Canyon Lands of southeastern Utah	32
23	East side of the Kaibab Plateau upwarp	33
24	Navajo Mountain	34
25	Elaborately carved frontal escarpment, Bryce Canyon National Park, Utah	38
26	Gypsum Canyon at mouth of Fable Valley in the Canyon Lands of southeastern Utah	39
27	Sunset Crater in Arizona	49
28	Abert squirrel of the Transition Zone	56
29	Chipmunk of the Transition Zone	57
30	The spreading ripple of a beaver	57
31	Desert bighorn in Lake Mead Recreational Area	60
32	Mule deer	61
33	An Indian ruin on the Verde River—Tuzigoot National Monument, Ariz.	80
34	Ventana Cave	81
35	Hohokam pottery effigy from Casa Grande National Monument, Ariz.	85
36	Hohokam carved shell	85
37	Casa Grande—a monument to the architectural ability of the Saladoans—Casa Grande National Monument	86

	<i>Page</i>
38 Hohokam jar from Casa Grande	87
39 Corner of embroidered cotton blanket (Salado Culture) from Tonto National Monument, Ariz.	87
40 Headband—slit tapestry weave in blue and white—Salado Culture	87
41 Salado breechcloth—diamond twill weave	88
42 Salado yucca fiber sandal	88
43 Pueblo Bonito—Chaco Canyon National Monument, N. Mex.	90
44 Check dams built by the Anasazi at Mesa Verde National Park, Colo.	91
45 Anasazi basket quiver from Canyon de Chelly, Ariz.	92
46 White House Ruin—Canyon de Chelly National Monument	93
47 Wupatki Ruin, Ariz.	94
48 Montezuma Castle, Ariz.	95
49 Betatakin Ruin—Navajo National Monument, Ariz.	97
50 Modern Indian Zuni Pueblo, N. Mex.	98
51 Flaming Gorge—looking down Green River to dam site	110
52 Fontanelle Reservoir site—looking upstream from dam site	111
53 Burnt Lake on the west slope of the Wind River Range	112
54 Hades Reservoir site—looking up the Duchesne River Valley	113
55 Castle Creek Reservoir site north of Gunnison, Colo.	115
56 Lake San Cristobal near Lake City, Colo.	116
57 Dewey Reservoir area	117
58 Westwater Canyon of Colorado River at Big Hole—Dewey Reservoir area	118
59 Canyon of Colorado River near Colorado-Utah State line	119
60 McPhee Dam site—looking down Dolores River Valley	120
61 McPhee Reservoir site	121
62 Hermosa Park Reservoir site north of Durango, Colo.	123
63 Lemon Reservoir site northeast of Durango, Colo.	124
64 Virgin City Dam site. Towers of Zion National Park form background	125
65 Horseshoe Reservoir site in Verde Valley, Ariz.	125
66 The Grand Canyon from Grandview Point	126
67 Burnt Springs Canyon from Twin Point	129
68 Looking toward Whitmore Wash and Pine Mountains from Shivwits Plateau	130
69 Bridge Canyon and Gneiss Canyon	131
70 The Grand Canyon above Bridge Canyon	134
71 Havasu Falls	135
72 View across the inner gorge of the Colorado River from Bridge Canyon	139
73 Where United States Highway 89 crosses Marble Gorge—Paria Plateau in the background	140
74 Mount Dellenbaugh from the rim of Green Springs Canyon, Shivwits Plateau	141
75 Peach Springs Draw	145
76 The Colorado River	146
77 Monument Valley	150
78 Junction of Green and Colorado Rivers	152
79 Colorado River from Deadhorse Point	154
80 Shafer Canyon from Deadhorse Point	155
81 View southeast from Upheaval Dome	156
82 View south from Upheaval Dome	157
83 View southwest from Upheaval Dome	158

	<i>Page</i>
84 Monument Canyon and Indian Creek country east of Colorado River from Junction Butte point	159
85 White rim sandstone caps the dark red towers of Monument Canyon	160
86 Junction Butte from the rim of Green River Canyon near the junction of the Green and Colorado Rivers	161
87 Junction Butte and Grays Pasture Plateau from south of the Needles	162
88 Dark Canyon—looking east over Elk Ridge to the Abajo Mountains	163
89 Arch Canyon—looking northwest over Elk Ridge	164
90 White Canyon, Tables of the Sun, and Navajo Mountain from vicinity of Natural Bridges National Monument	165
91 Beef Basin	166
92 Needles labyrinth, with La Sal Mountains in the distance	167
93 The Needles area—looking northeast over Indian Creek Valley	168
94 The Needles area from the air	169
95 Formations in the Needles area	170
96 Land of Standing Rocks	171
97 Southeastern end of the Kaiparowits bench and Navajo Mountain from near Sody tank	174
98 Colorado River and Navajo Mountain from the southeastern end of the Kaiparowits bench	175
99 Hole in Rock	176
100 View across Colorado River from left side of Hole in Rock	177
101 The Colorado River Canyon at Hole in Rock	178
102 The Crossing of the Fathers	179
103 The Escalante River Canyon in Hole in Rock area	180
104 Arch in Willow Creek Canyon in Hole in Rock area	181
105 Arch in Coyote Canyon in Hole in Rock area	182
106 The Henry Mountains from the road between Hanksville and Hite, Utah	186
107 Mouth of Trachyte Canyon	188
108 Trachyte Canyon	189
109 Arch Canyon from Elk Ridge	190
110 Dinosaur Quarry—Dinosaur National Monument	193
111 Green River Canyon from Harpers Corner in Dinosaur National Monument	194
112 Steamboat Rock, Echo Park, and the Green River	197
113 Whirlpool Canyon. Echo Park Dam site is in the narrow inner gorge	198
114 Meanders of Yampa River near its junction with the Green River	200
115 Yampa River Canyon	201
116 Split Mountain from the banks of the Green River	202
117 View of Silverton, Colo., from United States Highway 550	205
118 Mirror Lake Basin just west of the high Uinta Primitive Area	207
119 Signs, pole lines, and wide right-of-way clearing detract from the enjoyment of the natural scene	214

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MAPS

PLATE	1	Location and extent of basin	Facing Page 1
	2	Routes of air surveys and other travel	} In pocket
	3	Geological provinces	
	4	Dewey Reservoir site	
	5	Grand Canyon region	
	6	Bridge Canyon Project area	
	7	Land status of Canyon Lands of Utah	
	8	Distribution of population in the Canyon Lands of Utah	
	9	Suggested plan for recreational use of Canyon Lands of Utah	
	10	Colorado-Green River area, Canyon Lands of Utah	
	11	Dinosaur National Monument	
	12	Life zones	
	13	Geological sections	
	14	Archeological cultures	
	15	Reservoir sites	
	16	Existing public recreational areas	

INTRODUCTION

Section 2 (d) of the Boulder Canyon Project Adjustment Act of July 19, 1940, provides authority for financing conservation investigations and studies in connection with the work of the Bureau of Reclamation within the Colorado River Basin.

The Bureau of Reclamation, in November 1940, under the authority of the Adjustment Act, requested the National Park Service to identify the scenic, scientific and recreational resources of the Colorado Basin, as a part of a comprehensive plan for the utilization of the water resources of the region.

Since its establishment in 1917, the National Park Service has been concerned with these resources. At the present time it administers several areas directly affected by the developments planned by the Bureau of Reclamation.

On January 27, 1941, the Secretary of the Interior approved the inclusion of a basin-wide recreational survey as a part of the studies and investigations to be continued and extended under his direction for the formulation of a comprehensive plan of utilization of the waters of the entire Colorado River System. The Secretary also appointed Frederick Law Olmsted, distinguished landscape architect, with wide experience in regional and site planning, as consultant for the survey.

The principal purpose of the survey was to obtain the facts essential to the establishment of Departmental policies regarding classification, development and administration of possible water-control projects and areas within the basin, giving due regard to recreational possibilities and the presentation of scenery and other natural features.

The survey also embraced the study of recreational resources of large portions of the basin which are not administered by the Department. Informa-

tion thus gained will be helpful to the Bureau of Reclamation in avoiding needless sacrifices of existing and potential recreational values, and in utilizing opportunities to obtain recreational benefits as an incident to the development of water resources.

Another purpose of the survey was to identify and evaluate such areas as might be of outstanding national importance, so that measures may be taken to maintain them in a high state of preservation for public enjoyment. This study was not exhaustive. An attempt to enumerate and evaluate all types of recreational resources, both existing and potential, throughout the entire basin, would have been a huge undertaking beyond the scope of the survey.

The National Park Service first focused its attention on areas in which the most pressing problems occur, namely, Dinosaur National Monument, the Grand Canyon area, and the Canyon Lands of southeastern Utah. The work was done by the Branch of Lands (now the Land and Recreational Planning Division) of the Service, headed by Conrad L. Wirth, with Mr. Olmsted as consultant. Field headquarters of the survey were established in the National Park Service Region Three Office in Santa Fe, N. Mex. with one member of the field staff assigned to the Region Two Office in Omaha, Nebr., to cover problems falling within that region. Frequent consultation with Bureau of Reclamation officials was the rule. Valuable assistance was given by the Grazing Service (now included in the Bureau of Land Management), the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Geological Survey, as well as many other Federal and State agencies and private individuals. Appreciation is expressed to Dr. Herbert E. Gregory and Edwin D. McKee for their collaboration in the preparation of the chapter on the geology of the

basin, and to Dr. Emil W. Haury, Dr. Gordon C. Baldwin, and Dr. Jesse L. Nusbaum for their collaboration in the preparation of the chapter, Prehistory of Man. Appreciation is also expressed to the many individuals listed on page 223, who generously contributed their time and special knowledge in checking various portions of the life zone map and the biological information presented in the text.

Although the report is dated June 1946, a few minor revisions in the original draft have been made subsequently in order to include later information, such as revised height of proposed dams and the redesignation of Boulder Dam as Hoover Dam and Boulder Dam Recreational Area as Lake Mead Recreational Area.

NEWTON B. DRURY, *Director,*
National Park Service.

SUMMARY

The Colorado River Basin is one of the outstanding recreational regions in the United States because of its great variety of natural scenery, climatic conditions, areas and objects of scientific interest, abundant evidence of prehistoric occupation, and present Indian, Spanish, and Anglo cultures. Here one may enjoy a large amount of sunshine and find perfect climates and settings for various types of outdoor recreation the year around. The basin embraces latitudes from Mexico almost to Yellowstone National Park and altitudes ranging from 248 feet below sea level to 14,431 feet above sea level. All of the life zones of the United States are present except the Tropical Life Zone of southern Florida.

Geologic features.—An unusual feature of the basin is the peculiar alinement and local setting of the drainage channels, glaringly out of accord with the topography, exemplified by the mile-deep Grand Canyon through the Kaibab Plateau and Split Mountain Canyon. The central part of the Colorado Basin is unique in geologic history, topographic form, and scenic grandeur. Within it are displayed the oldest and youngest rocks exposed on the North American Continent. Major subdivisions of the geologic time scale are represented in orderly succession.

The Uinta Mountains and Uinta Basin are unique in the United States in that they trend east-west in contrast with the general north-south alinement of similar features elsewhere. The Uinta Basin is a famous source of fossils, and derives additional interest from its scattered outcrops of solid hydrocarbons, including rare forms, some of them unique and little understood. The outstanding features of the Colorado Plateau are the widespread Triassic, Jurassic, and Cretaceous strata in approximately horizontal position; the gigantic cliffs of different geological ages and marked by distinctive colors; and the multitude of canyons that carry the perennial, intermittent, and ephemeral run-off. In places, the surface has been roughened by folding, faulting, the building of volcanoes, and the intrusion of igneous rocks.

Bordering the Colorado Plateau on the east is a belt of tangled topography developed on rocks complex in structure, composition and relationships. The landscape is characteristic of the Rocky Mountains rather than the plateau country.

The Prescott, Ariz., area is significant in that great ore bodies have been brought up by faulting. Many mines have been developed in this region. The asbestos deposits that appear as conspicuous white lines from a distance are an outstanding geologic feature of the Sierra Ancha Mountains in central Arizona. Similar asbestos deposits are found in the Salt River Canyon.

The Verde Hot Springs, Soda Springs, fossil trackways of prehistoric mammals, salt deposits, prehistoric salt mines, and lake deposits with mollusks are important features of the Verde Valley.

The San Francisco Mountains, the White Mountains, and, to a lesser extent, the Mount Trumbull region are areas of geologically recent volcanic activity which have so modified both the appearance and character of the country as to merit special attention.

The lower portion of the basin, below the great plateau region, is totally different from that to the north. Rugged mountain ranges rise out of broad, flat valleys like islands in the sea. The mountains contain rocks of many geologic ages and their structural histories are complex.

The delta of the Colorado River is formed in, and is controlled by, one of the most remarkable and unique structural troughs in the earth's surface. It is a depression comparable to the trough of the Dead Sea and Jordan Valley in Palestine.

Events representing the history of the earth undoubtedly are more closely and simply illustrated by the record of the rocks in the Colorado Plateau than anywhere else in the world. In order that this history may be skillfully presented to visitors, emphasis must be placed on original materials. Facts must be dealt with and presented in a way that will guide people's thoughts toward a realization of the principles. The task is to lead people to the best

possible illustrations through the skillful development of roads and trails and to make available data necessary to a correct interpretation and correlation of facts.

Plants and animals.—Plants and animals are dependent upon one another in a manner so complex and far reaching that they cannot be fully enjoyed or protected separately. Without plants there can be no cool, clear trout streams; no shady camping spots; no fertile, humus-bearing soil; no food for other forms of life. Recreational enjoyment of plants ranges from subconscious appreciation of their beauty and shade to active interest and wonderment at the marvelous diversity of plant forms which results from their adaptation to extremes of climate and environment. The recreational value of animals is indicated by the fact that by 1945, in spite of wartime restrictions, 20 million anglers and hunters spent 2 billion dollars per year in pursuit of their sport. But fishing and hunting are only two of the many recreational values of wildlife.

Originally the basin had a much greater wealth of vegetation and wildlife than at present. Many desert watercourses that present generations are accustomed to think of as dry washes or as intermittent streams once flowed the year around. The more luxuriant vegetation of those days checked the runoff from the storms more efficiently than it is checked at present. After 1870, cattle increased greatly in the desert regions and the forage thinned and disappeared. Trampling hoofs stripped the thin protecting layer of decaying plant materials from the surface of the soil and as a result plant growth changed or disappeared and animal life was starved out. Animal life in the mountains has undergone a corresponding decrease as a result of direct persecution, as well as from forage and habitat depletion.

Another cause of depletion of wildlife has been the occupancy of most of the choice, fertile regions by cities and farms. Elk, deer, beaver, turkeys, and many wild creatures, today considered to be almost exclusively mountain dwellers, originally had their centers of abundance, particularly during the winters, in the lower hills and adjacent valleys.

The decline of wildlife reached a low in the late 1920's. Since then, vigorous conservation efforts have partially restored some species. The viewpoint that wildlife is a direct product of the land, to be

increased by restoring the appropriate environment and growing conditions, and, where desired, to be harvested according to a definite plan, with a definite financial return like any other crop, was first emphasized during the early 1930's. This concept had wide appeal and has enlisted support for conservation efforts. Restoration has commenced but lags behind knowledge. Today millions of tons of soil continue to wash away needlessly. In the Southwest proper, grazing capacity has long since been exceeded and vegetation is far from adequate to protect the surface against erosive forces.

Grazing is a major basin industry that needs stabilization.

The problem of determining the proper uses of the Colorado River Basin is largely one of conserving its basic soil and water. In general, the present economic use pattern seems well adapted to the land. The principal need is to replace destructive methods by up-to-date ones with respect to existing land uses. The public is uninformed regarding basic conservation issues largely because conservation education has lacked focus. More support is needed for conservation education.

Archeologic features.—The Colorado River Basin contains abundant evidence of prehistoric occupation and use by man. Exploring the ruins and learning the dramatic story of these early people is one of the important recreational activities in the basin. The evidence of prehistoric settlement and use of the lands and waters constitute a resource of recreational and historical significance of unique and irreplaceable value to the Nation.

A considerable part of the archeological wealth of the Southwest is concentrated in valleys adjacent to adequate water supply and tillable fields. The construction of dams and flooding of river valleys will destroy thousands of these prehistoric and historic ruins. To offset this potential loss, there is a definite and immediate need for a well-planned and coordinated archeological program that will include specific recovery measures. The program should include (1) a careful archeological survey of each dam and reservoir site; (2) excavation of important archeological sites; and (3) thorough laboratory study and adequate publication of the scientific data.

Factors determining the recreational values of reservoirs.—In the arid portions of the basin, the

the few the thrills of boating down the untamed river and reduce the apparent depths of the river canyons, they would be confined in the canyon of the Colorado and Green Rivers and have little, if any, effect on the great recreational resources of the region. Instead, the reservoirs would provide a means of access for many to see the wonders of the canyons.

The area is large enough and varied enough to permit the continued use and development of its resources—water power, minerals, forage, and recreation. Except in certain limited sections where a single use is essential to obtain the greatest benefits, these resources can be developed and used simultaneously.

The most important recreational sections of the Canyon Lands of southeastern Utah are the Grays Pasture–Junction Butte area, the Elk Ridge–Needles area, the Lands End area, the Hole in Rock area, the Hite area, the Wahweap area, the Goose-necks of the San Juan River, the Arch Canyon area, and Fisher Towers. Certain parts of these areas which contain known features of national importance should be withdrawn to afford them proper protection.

Dinosaur National Monument.—This monument was established in 1915 to preserve a rich deposit of fossilized dinosaur bones. In 1938, it was extended to include other resources of scientific interest found in the adjoining canyons of the Green and Yampa Rivers. Functionally, the monument now consists of the Quarry Unit, comprising three or four thousand acres, and the Canyon Unit, consisting of about 206,000 acres.

Two dam sites for utilizing the water resources of the Green and Yampa Rivers—the Echo Park and Split Mountain—are located in the monument. Construction of dams at these sites would adversely alter the dominant geological and wilderness qualities and the relatively minor archeological and wildlife values of the Canyon Unit so that it would no longer possess national monument qualifications. The Echo Park project would not affect the Quarry Unit. At the time this report was prepared, data were not available to determine whether the proposed pressure tunnel from Split Mountain Dam to a power plant on the Green River would affect the Quarry Unit.

The policy of the National Park Service, as the

administrative agency now responsible for Dinosaur National Monument, is to make the protection of the natural and archeological values of the area the controlling factor in administering it. Before authorization is given to develop the water resources of the monument and to recognize water use as the principal consideration in the administration of the Canyon Unit, it should be clearly shown (1) that the economic and social values of such development will exceed the costs of producing them; (2) that it would be more economical to develop the water resources of the monument rather than some other resources available for the same purpose within practicable reach; and (3) that it would be of greater benefit to the whole Nation to develop the area for water storage and power than to retain the monument in a natural state for the enjoyment of all the people.

Conservation of recreational resources.—The Colorado River Basin lies directly across all lines of travel between the rapidly increasing population of California and the densely populated eastern half of the United States. In the past the basin was to a large extent considered just a vast space that had to be crossed on the way to California. Now, with the Pacific Coast more fully developed, people seeking undeveloped, uncrowded areas are beginning to discover the basin. It is time for immediate action which will assure the preservation of its many and varied recreational features. It is also time to develop facilities which will enable people to see and enjoy the region. There are natural limitations on the amount of land that can be placed under cultivation. There is a limit, already reached in many sections, on the number of domestic animals that can be grazed. But the possibilities for the development of the recreational use of the basin are almost unlimited.

Some of the more important areas that should be preserved and made available for recreation are the western slope of the Wind River Range in Wyoming; the San Juan–San Miguel–Uncompagre Mountain area, White River Plateau, the Elk Mountain area, and the Park Range in Colorado; the Uinta Mountains, the Aquarius Plateau–Border Mountain area, Monument Valley, and the Canyon Lands of southeastern Utah; the Gila primitive area and Manuelito area in New Mexico; Meteor Crater, Fort Bowie, the Blue Range area

Mount Baldy-White Mountains area, the San Franciscan volcanic field, the Mogollon Rim area, Traverine Bridge, and the Kofa Mountains in Arizona; and Palm Canyon in California. Nationally significant archeological sites that should be permanently preserved are Poncho House in Utah; and Kinishba Ruins, Clear Creek Ruins, Chaves Pass Ruins, and Awatovi in Arizona.

To preserve the great areas of open country free of scattered reminders of city life and to maintain and stimulate the economic life of existing communities, it is recommended that facilities for the accommodation of travelers and vacationists be con-

centrated near existing towns and villages. Many towns are now focal points for recreational use of the surrounding country. This condition should be encouraged and developed.

While it will be necessary, in developing the resources of the basin, to construct new roads and improve existing ones and to construct other facilities, it must not be forgotten that among the basin's greatest recreational assets are the large areas in which there are no roads or other developments. Some roadless areas have been established, others are needed.